

THE GOSPEL
OF SRI
RAMAKRISHNA

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THE GOSPEL OF
SRI RAMAKRISHNA

*Originally recorded in Bengali
by M., a disciple of the Master*



THE GOSPEL OF SRI RAMAKRISHNA



TRANSLATED BY
SWAMI NIHILANANDA



INDIA

**SRI RAMAKRISHNA MATH
MYLAPORE, MADRAS**

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FOREWORD

IN THE HISTORY of the arts genius is a thing of very rare occurrence. Rarer still, however, are the competent reporters and recorders of that genius. The world has had many hundreds of admirable poets and philosophers ; but of these hundreds only a very few have had the fortune to attract a Boswell or an Eckermann.

When we leave the field of art for that of spiritual religion, the scarcity of competent reporters becomes even more strongly marked. Of the day-to-day life of the great theocentric saints and contemplatives we know, in the great majority of cases, nothing whatever. Many, it is true, have recorded their doctrines in writing, and a few, such as St. Augustine, Suso and St. Teresa, have left us autobiographies of the greatest value. But all doctrinal writing is in some measure formal and impersonal, while the autobiographer tends to omit what he regards as trifling matters and suffers from the further disadvantage of being unable to say how he strikes other people and in what way he affects their lives. Moreover, most saints have left neither writings nor self-portraits, and for a knowledge of their lives, their characters and their teachings, we are forced to rely upon the records made by their disciples who, in most cases, have proved themselves singularly incompetent as reporters and biographers. Hence the special interest attaching to this enormously detailed account of the daily life and conversations of Sri Ramakrishna.

"M", as the author modestly styles himself, was peculiarly qualified for his task. To a reverent love for his master, to a deep and experiential knowledge of that master's teaching, he added a prodigious memory for the small happenings of each day and a happy gift for recording them in an interesting and realistic way. Making good use of his natural gifts and of the circumstances in which he found himself, "M" produced a book unique, so far as my knowledge goes, in the literature of hagiography. No other saint has had so able and indefatigable a Boswell. Never have the small events of a contemplative's daily life been described with such wealth of intimate detail. Never have the casual and unstudied utterances of a great religious teacher been set down with so minute a fidelity. To Western readers, it is true, this fidelity and this wealth of detail are sometimes a trifle disconcerting ; for the social, religious and intellectual frames of reference within which Sri Ramakrishna did his thinking and expressed his feelings were entirely Indian. But after the first few surprises and bewilderments, we begin to find something peculiarly stimulating and instructive about the very strangeness and, to our eyes, the eccentricity of the man revealed to us in "M's" narrative. What a scholastic philosopher

would call the "accidents" of Ramakrishna's life were intensely Hindu and therefore, so far as we in the West are concerned, unfamiliar and hard to understand; its "essence", however, was intensely mystical and therefore universal. To read through these conversations in which mystical doctrine alternates with an unfamiliar kind of humour, and where discussions of the oddest aspects of Hindu mythology give place to the most profound and subtle utterance about the nature of Ultimate Reality, is in itself a liberal education in humility, tolerance and suspense of judgment. We must be grateful to the translator for his excellent version of a book so curious and delightful as a biographical document, so precious, at the same time, for what it teaches us of the life of the spirit.

ALDOUS HUXLEY

PUBLISHER'S NOTE

This volume is a reprint of the excellent American edition of *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* by Swami Nikhilananda, the Head of the Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Centre of New York. In it he has translated and chronologically arranged the matter of the five volumes in Bengali, entitled *Sri Sri Ramakrishna Kalhamrita*, by a staunch devotee who modestly designated himself as 'M'. The original book is a unique work in Bengali literature, and Swami Nikhilananda's English version, too, has already attained much popularity in the West. We are greatly indebted to him for allowing us to use this translation.

During the lifetime of "M", selections from the Bengali volumes were translated into English and published by us in two volumes in the years 1907 and 1922, each running into several editions. These are now out of print, and the present volume admirably replaces them.

We have omitted the rather lengthy biographical Introduction to the American edition, since the Indian public is more or less familiar with the life-incidents of the Master and his disciples. The get-up of the book is not what we wished it to be, nor is the price moderate enough, owing to the handicaps imposed by the war. We, however, confidently hope that this Indian edition will prove of great service to the reading public on this side of the globe.

SRI RAMAKRISHNA MATH
Mylapore, Madras
February 25, 1944

THE PUBLISHER

PREFACE

The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna is the English translation of the *Sri Sri Ramakrishna Kathamrita*, the conversations of Sri Ramakrishna with his disciples, devotees, and visitors, recorded by Mahendranath Gupta, who wrote the book under the pseudonym of "M." The conversations in Bengali fill five volumes, the first of which was published in 1897 and the last shortly after M.'s death in 1932. Sri Ramakrishna Math, Madras, has published in two volumes an English translation of selected chapters from the monumental Bengali work. I have consulted these while preparing my translation.

M., one of the intimate disciples of Sri Ramakrishna, was present during all the conversations recorded in the main body of the book and noted them down in his diary. They therefore have the value of almost stenographic records. In Appendix A are given several conversations which took place in the absence of M., but of which he received a first-hand record from persons concerned. The conversations will bring before the reader's mind an intimate picture of the Master's eventful life from March 1882 to April 24, 1886, only a few months before his passing away. During this period he came in contact chiefly with English-educated Bengalis; from among them he selected his disciples and the bearers of his message, and with them he shared his rich spiritual experiences.

I have made a literal translation, omitting only a few pages of no particular interest to English-speaking readers. Often literary grace has been sacrificed for the sake of literal translation. No translation can do full justice to the original. This difficulty is all the more felt in the present work, whose contents are of a deep mystical nature and describe the inner experiences of a great seer. Human language is an altogether inadequate vehicle to express supersensuous perception. Sri Ramakrishna was almost illiterate. He never clothed his thoughts in formal language. His words sought to convey his direct realization of Truth. His conversation was in a village patois. Therein lies its charm. In order to explain to his listeners an abstruse philosophy, he, like Christ before him, used with telling effect homely parables and illustrations, culled from his observation of the daily life around him.

The reader will find mentioned in this work many visions and experiences that fall outside the ken of physical science and even psychology. With the development of modern knowledge the border line between the natural and the supernatural is ever shifting its position. Genuine mystical experiences are not as suspect now as they were half a century ago. The words of Sri Ramakrishna have already exerted a tremendous influence in the land of his

birth. Savants of Europe have found in his words the ring of universal truth. But these words were not the product of intellectual cogitation ; they were rooted in direct experience. Hence, to students of religion, psychology, and physical science, these experiences of the Master are of immense value for the understanding of religious phenomena in general. No doubt Sri Ramakrishna was a Hindu of the Hindus ; yet his experiences transcended the limits of the dogmas and creeds of Hinduism. Mystics of religions other than Hinduism will find in Sri Ramakrishna's experiences a corroboration of the experiences of their own prophets and seers. And this is very important today for the resuscitation of religious value. The sceptical reader may pass by the supernatural experiences ; he will yet find in the book enough material to provoke his serious thought and solve many of his spiritual problems.

There are repetitions of teachings and parables in the book. I have kept them purposely. They have their charm and usefulness, repeated as they were in different settings. Repetition is unavoidable in a work of this kind. In the first place, different seekers come to a religious teacher with questions of more or less identical nature ; hence the answers will be of more or less identical pattern. Besides, religious teachers of all times and climes have tried, by means of repetition, to hammer truths into the stony soil of the recalcitrant human mind. Finally, repetition does not seem tedious if the ideas repeated are dear to a man's heart. . . .

The book contains many songs sung either by the Master or by the devotees. These form an important feature of the spiritual tradition of Bengal and were for the most part written by men of mystical experience. For giving the songs their present form I am grateful to Mr. John Moffitt, Jr.

In the preparation of this manuscript I have received ungrudging help from several friends. Miss Margaret Woodrow Wilson and Mr. Joseph Campbell have worked hard in editing my translation. Mrs. Elizabeth Davidson has typed, more than once, the entire manuscript and rendered other valuable help. Mr. Aldous Huxley has laid me under a debt of gratitude by writing the Foreword. I sincerely thank them all.

In the spiritual firmament Sri Ramakrishna is a waxing crescent. Within one hundred years of his birth and fifty years of his death his message has spread across land and sea. Romain Rolland has described him as the fulfilment of the spiritual aspirations of the three hundred millions of Hindus for the last two thousand years. Mahatma Gandhi has written : "His life enables us to see God face to face. . . . Ramakrishna was a living embodiment of godliness." He is being recognized as a compeer of Krishna, Buddha, and Christ.

The life and teachings of Sri Ramakrishna have redirected the thoughts of the denationalized Hindus to the spiritual ideals of their forefathers. During the latter part of the nineteenth century his was the time-honoured role of the Saviour of the Eternal Religion of the Hindus. His teachings played an important part in liberalizing the minds of orthodox pundits and hermits. Even now he is the silent force that is moulding the spiritual destiny of India. His great disciple, Swami Vivekananda, was the first Hindu missionary to preach

the message of Indian culture to the enlightened minds of Europe and America. The full consequence of Swami Vivekananda's work is still in the womb of the future.

May this translation of the first book of its kind in the religious history of the world, being the record of the direct words of a prophet, help stricken humanity to come nearer to the Eternal Verity of life and remove dissension and quarrel from among the different faiths! May it enable seekers of Truth to grasp the subtle laws of the supersensuous realm, and unfold before man's restricted vision the spiritual foundation of the universe, the unity of existence, and the divinity of the soul!

NEW YORK

Sri Ramakrishna's Birthday

February 1942

NIKHILANANDA



Sri Yukteswar Ashram
Centre for the Arts

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SRI RAMAKRISHNA

तव कथामृतं न प्रजीवनं कविभिरीदितं कल्पशयहम् ।
अवगमद्वालं श्रीमद्वातं सुवि गृणन्ति ते भूरिदा जनाः ॥

Tava kuthāmṛtaṃ tapta jīvanam
Kavibhir iditarām kālmaśāpatham ।
Sravaṇāmañgalām śrimad ātatam
Bhuvi gṛṇanti te bhūridā janāḥ ॥

—Srimadbhāgavatam X. xxxi. 7

The nectar of your story, the praise of poet-seers,
Elixir to parched souls, delight of listening ears,
The cleanser out of sin, is grand and glorious ;
They who spread it wide on earth are generous.

I

MASTER AND DISCIPLE

March 1882

28-2-4

IT WAS ON A SUNDAY in spring, a few days after Sri Ramakrishna's birthday, that M. met him the first time. Sri Ramakrishna lived at the Kalibari, the temple garden of Mother Kali, on the bank of the Ganges at Dakshineswar.

M., being at leisure on Sundays, had gone with his friend Sidhu to visit several gardens at Baranagore. As they were walking in Prasanna Bannerji's garden, Sidhu said : "There is a charming place on the bank of the Ganges where a paramahamsa lives. Should you like to go there ?" M. assented and they started immediately for the Dakshineswar temple garden. They arrived at the main gate at dusk and went straight to Sri Ramakrishna's room. And there they found him seated on a wooden couch, facing the east. With a smile on his face he was talking of God. The room was full of people, all seated on the floor, drinking in his words in deep silence.

M. stood there speechless and looked on. It was as if he were standing where all the holy places met and as if Sukadeva himself were speaking the word of God, or as if Sri Chaitanya were singing the name and glories of the Lord in Puri with Ramananda, Swarup, and the other devotees.

Sri Ramakrishna said : "When, hearing the name of Hari or Rama once, you shed tears and your hair stands on end, then you may know for certain that you do not have to perform such devotions as the sandhya any more. Then only will you have a right to renounce rituals ; or rather, rituals will drop away of themselves. Then it will be enough if you repeat only the name of Rama or Hari, or even simply Om." Continuing, he said, "The sandhya merges in the Gayatri, and the Gayatri merges in Om."

M. looked around him with wonder and said to himself : "What a beautiful place ! What a charming man ! How beautiful his words are ! I have no wish to move from this spot." After a few minutes he thought, "Let me see the place first ; then I'll come back here and sit down."

As he left the room with Sidhu, he heard the sweet music of the evening service arising in the temple from gong, bell, drum, and cymbal. He could hear music from the nahabat, too, at the south end of the garden. The sounds travelled over the Ganges, floating away and losing themselves in the distance.

A soft spring wind was blowing, laden with the fragrance of flowers ; the moon had just appeared. It was as if nature and man together were preparing for the evening worship. M. and Sidhu visited the twelve Siva temples, the Radhakanta temple, and the temple of Bhavatarini. And as M. watched the services before the images his heart was filled with joy.

On the way back to Sri Ramakrishna's room the two friends talked. Sidhu told M. that the temple garden had been founded by Rani Rasmani. He said that God was worshipped there daily as Kali, Krishna, and Siva, and that within the gates many sadhus and beggars were fed. When they reached Sri Ramakrishna's door again, they found it shut, and Brinde, the maid, standing outside. M., who had been trained in English manners and would not enter a room without permission, asked her, "Is the holy man in ?" Brinde replied, "Yes, he's in the room."

M : "How long has he lived here ?"

BRINDE : "Oh, he has been here a long time."

M : "Does he read many books ?"

BRINDE : "Books ? Oh, dear no ! They're all on his tongue."

M. had just finished his studies in college. It amazed him to hear that Sri Ramakrishna read no books.

M : "Perhaps it is time for his evening worship. May we go into the room ? Will you tell him we are anxious to see him ?"

BRINDE : "Go right in, children. Go in and sit down."

Entering the room, they found Sri Ramakrishna alone, seated on the wooden couch. Incense had just been burnt and all the doors were shut. As he entered, M. with folded hands saluted the Master. Then, at the Master's bidding, he and Sidhu sat on the floor. Sri Ramakrishna asked them : "Where do you live ? What is your occupation ? Why have you come to Baranagore ?" M. answered the questions, but he noticed that now and then the Master seemed to become absent-minded. Later he learnt that this mood is called bhava, ecstasy. It is like the state of the angler who has been sitting with his rod ; the fish comes and swallows the bait, and the float begins to tremble ; the angler is on the alert ; he grips the rod and watches the float steadily and eagerly ; he will not speak to anyone. Such was the state of Sri Ramakrishna's mind. Later M. heard, and himself noticed, that Sri Ramakrishna would often go into this mood after dusk, sometimes becoming totally unconscious of the outer world.

M : "Perhaps you want to perform your evening worship. In that case may we take our leave ?"

SRI RAMAKRISHNA (*still in ecstasy*) : "No—evening worship ? No, it is not exactly that."

After a little conversation M. saluted the Master and took his leave. "Come again", Sri Ramakrishna said.

On his way home M. began to wonder : "Who is this serene-looking man who is drawing me back to him ? Is it possible for a man to be great without being a scholar ? How wonderful it is ! I should like to see him again. He himself said, 'Come again.' I shall go tomorrow or the day after."

M.'s second visit to Sri Ramakrishna took place on the southeast verandah at eight o'clock in the morning. The Master was about to be shaved, the barber having just arrived. As the cold season still lingered he had put on a moleskin shawl bordered with red. Seeing M., the Master said : "So you have come. That's good. Sit down here." He was smiling. He stammered a little when he spoke.

SRI RAMAKRISHNA (*to M.*) : "Where do you live ?"

M : "In Calcutta, sir."

SRI RAMAKRISHNA : "Where are you staying here ?"

M : "I am at Baranagore at my older sister's—Ishan Kaviraj's house."

SRI RAMAKRISHNA : "Oh, at Ishan's ? Well, how is Keshab now ? He was very ill."

M : "Indeed, I have heard so too, but I believe he is well now."

SRI RAMAKRISHNA : "I made a vow to worship the Mother with green coconut and sugar on Keshab's recovery. Sometimes, in the early hours of the morning, I would wake up and cry before Her : 'Mother, please make Keshab well again. If Keshab doesn't live, whom shall I talk with when I go to Calcutta ?' And so it was that I resolved to offer Her the green coconut and sugar.

"Tell me, do you know of a certain Mr. Cook who has come to Calcutta ? Is it true that he is giving lectures ? Once Keshab took me on a steamer, and this Mr. Cook, too, was in the party."

M : "Yes, sir, I have heard something like that, but I have never been to his lectures. I don't know much about him."

SRI RAMAKRISHNA : "Pratap's brother came here. He stayed a few days. He had nothing to do and said he wanted to live here. I came to know that he had left his wife and children with his father-in-law. He has a whole brood of them ! So I took him to task. Just fancy ! He is the father of so many children ! Will people from the neighbourhood feed them and bring them up ? He isn't even ashamed that someone else is feeding his wife and children, and that they have been left at his father-in-law's house. I scolded him very hard and asked him to look for a job. Then he was willing to leave here.

"Are you married ?"

M : "Yes, sir."

SRI RAMAKRISHNA (*with a shudder*) : "Oh, Ramlal ! Alas, he is married !"

Like one guilty of a terrible offence, M. sat motionless, his eyes fixed on the ground. He thought, "Is it such a wicked thing to get married ?"

The Master continued, "Have you any children ?"

M. this time could hear the beating of his own heart. He whispered in a trembling voice, "Yes, sir, I have children."

Very sadly Sri Ramakrishna said, "Ah me ! He even has children !"

Thus rebuked M. sat speechless. His pride had received a blow. After a few minutes Sri Ramakrishna looked at him kindly and said affectionately : "You see, you have certain good signs. I know them by looking at a person's

¹ A nephew of Sri Ramakrishna, and a priest in the Kali temple.

forehead, his eyes, and so on. Tell me, now, what kind of person is your wife? Has she spiritual attributes, or is she under the power of avidya?"

M : "She is all right. But I am afraid she is ignorant."

MASTER (*with evident displeasure*) : "And you are a man of knowledge!"

M. had yet to learn the distinction between knowledge and ignorance. Up to this time his conception had been that one got knowledge from books and schools. Later on he gave up this false conception. He was taught that to know God is knowledge, and not to know Him, ignorance. When Sri Ramakrishna exclaimed, "And you are a man of knowledge!", M.'s ego was again badly shocked.

MASTER : "Well, do you believe in God with form or without form?"

M., rather surprised, said to himself : "How can one believe in God without form when one believes in God with form? And if one believes in God without form, how can one believe that God has a form? Can these two contradictory ideas be true at the same time? Can ■ white liquid like milk be black?"

M : "Sir, I like to think of God as formless."

MASTER : "Very good. It is enough to have faith in either aspect. You believe in God without form; that is quite all right. But never for a moment think that this alone is true and all else false. Remember that God with form is just as true as God without form. But hold fast to your own conviction."

The assertion that both are equally true amazed M.; he had never learnt this from his books. Thus his ego received a third blow; but since it was not yet completely crushed, he came forward to argue with the Master a little more.

M : "Sir, suppose one believes in God with form. Certainly He is not the clay image!"

MASTER (*interrupting*) : "But why clay? It is an image of Spirit."

M. could not quite understand the significance of this "image of Spirit". "But, sir," he said to the Master, "one should explain to those who worship the clay image that it is *not* God, and that, while worshipping it, they should have God in view and not the clay image. One should not worship clay."

MASTER (*sharply*) : "That's the one hobby of you Calcutta people—giving lectures and bringing others to the light! Nobody ever stops to consider how to get the light himself. Who are you to teach others?"

"He who is the Lord of the Universe will teach everyone. He alone teaches us, who has created this universe; who has made the sun and moon, men and beasts, and all other beings; who has provided means for their sustenance; who has given children parents and endowed them with love to bring them up. The Lord has done so many things—will He not show people the way to worship Him? If they need teaching, then He will be the Teacher. He is our Inner Guide."

"Suppose there is an error in worshipping the clay image: doesn't God know that through it He alone is being invoked? He will be pleased with that very worship. Why should you get a headache over it? You had better try for knowledge and devotion yourself."

• This time M. felt that his ego was completely crushed. He now said to himself : "Yes, he has spoken the truth. What need is there for me to teach others ? Have I known God ? Do I really love Him ? I haven't room enough for myself in my bed, and I am inviting my friend to share it with me ! I know nothing about God, yet I am trying to teach others. What a shame ! How foolish I am ! This is not mathematics or history or literature, that one can teach it to others. No, this is the deep mystery of God. What he says appeals to me."

This was M.'s first argument with the Master, and happily his last.

MASTER : " You were talking of worshipping the clay image. Even if the image is made of clay, there is need for that sort of worship. God Himself has provided different forms of worship. He who is the Lord of the Universe has arranged all these forms to suit different men in different stages of knowledge.

" The mother cooks different dishes to suit the stomachs of her different children. Suppose she has five children. If there is a fish to cook, she prepares various dishes from it—pilau, pickled fish, fried fish, and so on—to suit their different tastes and powers of digestion.

" Do you understand me ? "

M. (*humblly*) : " Yes, sir. How, sir, may we fix our minds on God ? "

MASTER : " Repeat God's name and sing His glories, and keep holy company ; and now and then visit God's devotees and holy men. The mind cannot dwell on God if it is immersed day and night in worldliness, in worldly duties and responsibilities ; it is most necessary to go into solitude now and then and think of God. To fix the mind on God is very difficult, in the beginning, unless one practises meditation in solitude. When a tree is young it should be fenced all around ; otherwise it may be destroyed by cattle.

" To meditate, you should withdraw within yourself or retire to a secluded corner or to the forest. And you should always discriminate between the Real and the unreal. God alone is real, the Eternal Substance ; all else is unreal, that is, impermanent. By discriminating thus, one should shake off impermanent objects from the mind. • • •

M. (*humblly*) : " How ought we to live in the world ? "

MASTER : " Do all your duties, but keep your mind on God. Live with all—with wife and children, father and mother—and serve them. Treat them as if they were very dear to you, but know in your heart of hearts that they do not belong to you.

" A maid-servant in the house of a rich man performs all the household duties, but her thoughts are fixed on her own home in her native village. She brings up her master's children as if they were her own. She even speaks of them as ' my Rama ' or ' my Hari '. But in her own mind she knows very well that they do not belong to her at all.

" The tortoise moves about in the water. But can you guess where her thoughts are ? There on the bank, where her eggs are lying. Do all your duties in the world, but keep your mind on God.

"If you enter the world without first cultivating love for God, you will be entangled more and more. You will be overwhelmed with its danger, its grief, its sorrows. And the more you think of worldly things, the more you will be attached to them.

"First rub your hands with oil and then break open the jack-fruit; otherwise they will be smeared with its sticky milk. First secure the oil of divine love, and then set your hands to the duties of the world.

"But one must go into solitude to attain this divine love. To get butter from milk you must let it set into curd in a secluded spot: if it is too much disturbed, milk won't turn into curd. Next, you must put aside all other duties, sit in a quiet spot, and churn the curd. Only then do you get butter.

"Further, by meditating on God in solitude the mind acquires knowledge, dispassion, and devotion. But the very same mind goes downward if it dwells in the world. In the world there is only one thought: 'woman and gold'."

"The world is water and the mind milk. If you pour milk into water they become one; you cannot find the pure milk any more. But turn the milk into curd and churn it into butter. Then, when that butter is placed in water, it will float. So, practise spiritual discipline in solitude and obtain the butter of knowledge and love. Even if you keep that butter in the water of the world the two will not mix. The butter will float.

"Together with this, you must practise discrimination. 'Woman and gold' is impermanent. God is the only Eternal Substance. What does a man get with money? Food, clothes, and a dwelling-place—nothing more. You cannot realize God with its help. Therefore money can never be the goal of life. That is the process of discrimination. Do you understand?"

M: "Yes, sir. I recently read a Sanskrit play called *Prabodha Chandrodaya*. It deals with discrimination."

MASTER: "Yes, discrimination about objects. Consider—what is there in money or in a beautiful body? Discriminate and you will find that even the body of a beautiful woman consists of bones, flesh, fat, and other disagreeable things. Why should a man give up God and direct his attention to such things? Why should a man forget God for their sake?"

M. "Is it possible to see God?"

The term "woman and gold", which has been used throughout in a collective sense, occurs again and again in the teachings of Sri Ramakrishna to designate the chief impediments to spiritual progress. This favourite expression of the Master, "kamini kanchan", has often been misconstrued. By it he meant only "lust and greed", the baneful influence of which retards the aspirant's spiritual growth. He used the word "kamini", or "woman", as a concrete term for the sex instinct when addressing his male devotees. He advised women, on the other hand, to shun "man". "Kanchan", or "gold", symbolizes greed, which is the other obstacle to spiritual life.

Sri Ramakrishna never taught his disciples to hate any woman, or womankind in general. This can be seen clearly by going through all his teachings under this head and judging them collectively. The Master looked on all women as so many images of the Divine Mother of the Universe. He paid the highest homage to womankind by accepting a woman as his guide while practising the very profound spiritual disciplines of Tantra. His wife, known and revered as the Holy Mother, was his constant companion and first disciple. At the end of his spiritual practice he literally worshipped his wife as the embodiment of the Goddess Kali, the Divine Mother. After his passing away the Holy Mother became the spiritual guide not only of a large number of householders, but also of many monastic members of the Ramakrishna Order.

• MASTER : "Yes, certainly. Living in solitude now and then, repeating God's name and singing His glories, and discriminating between the Real and the unreal—these are the means to employ to see Him."

M : "Under what conditions does one see God ?"

MASTER : "Cry to the Lord with an intensely yearning heart and you will certainly see Him. People shed a whole jug of tears for wife and children. They swim in tears for money. But who weeps for God ? Cry to Him with a real cry."

The Master sang :

1-3-45 Cry to your Mother Syama with a real cry, O mind !
And how can She hold Herself from you ?
How can Syama stay away ?
How can your Mother Kali hold Herself away ?

O mind, if you are in earnest, bring Her an offering
Of bel-leaves and hibiscus flowers :
Lay at Her feet your offering
And with it mingle the fragrant sandal-paste of Love.

Continuing, he said : "Longing is like the rosy dawn. After the dawn out comes the sun. Longing is followed by the vision of God.

"God reveals Himself to a devotee who feels drawn to Him by the combined force of these three attractions : the attraction of worldly possessions for the worldly man, the child's attraction for its mother, and the husband's attraction for the chaste wife. If one feels drawn to Him by the combined force of these three attractions, then through it one can attain Him.

"The point is, to love God even as the mother loves her child, the chaste wife her husband, and the worldly man his wealth. Add together these three forces of love, these three powers of attraction, and give it all to God. Then you will certainly see Him.

"It is necessary to pray to Him with a longing heart. The kitten knows only how to call its mother, crying, 'Mew, mew !' It remains satisfied wherever its mother puts it. And the mother cat puts the kitten sometimes in the kitchen, sometimes on the floor, and sometimes on the bed. When it suffers it cries only, 'Mew, mew !' That's all it knows. But as soon as the mother hears this cry, wherever she may be, she comes to the kitten."

It was Sunday afternoon when M. came on his third visit to the Master. He had been profoundly impressed by his first two visits to this wonderful man. He had been thinking of the Master constantly, and of the utterly simple way he explained the deep truths of the spiritual life. Never before had he met such a man.

* Sri Ramakrishna was sitting on the small couch. The room was filled with devotees,¹ who had taken advantage of the holiday to come to see

¹ The word is generally used in the text to denote one devoted to God, a worshipper of the Personal God, or a follower of the path of love. A devotee of Sri Ramakrishna is one who is devoted to Sri Ramakrishna and follows his teachings. The word "disciple", when used in connexion with Sri Ramakrishna, refers to one who had been initiated into spiritual life by Sri Ramakrishna and who regarded him as his guru.

the Master. M. had not yet become acquainted with any of them : so he took his seat in a corner. The Master smiled as he talked with the devotees.

He addressed his words particularly to a young man of nineteen, named Narendranath,¹ who was a college student and frequented the Sadharan Brahmo Samaj. His eyes were bright, his words were full of spirit, and he had the look of a lover of God.

M. guessed that the conversation was about worldly men, who look down on those who aspire to spiritual things. The Master was talking about the great number of such people in the world, and about how to deal with them.

MASTER (*to Narendra*) : "How do you feel about it ? Worldly people say all kinds of things about the spiritually minded. But look here ! When an elephant moves along the street, any number of curs and other small animals may bark and cry after it ; but the elephant doesn't even look back at them. If people speak ill of you, what will you think of them ?"

NARENDRa : "I shall think that dogs are barking at me."

MASTER (*smiling*) : "Oh, no ! You mustn't go that far, my child ! (*Laughter.*) God dwells in all beings. But you may be intimate only with good people ; you must keep away from the evil-minded. God is even in the tiger ; but you cannot embrace the tiger on that account. (*Laughter.*) You may say, 'Why run away from a tiger, which is also a manifestation of God ?' The answer to that is : 'Those who tell you to run away are also manifestations of God—and why shouldn't you listen to them ?'

"Let me tell you a story. In a forest there lived a holy man who had many disciples. One day he taught them to see God in all beings and, knowing this, to bow low before them all. A disciple went to the forest to gather wood for the sacrificial fire. Suddenly he heard an outcry : 'Get out of the way ! A mad elephant is coming !' All but the disciple of the holy man took to their heels. He reasoned that the elephant was also God in another form. Then why should he run away from it ? He stood still, bowed before the animal, and began to sing its praises. The mahut of the elephant was shouting : 'Run away ! Run away !' But the disciple didn't move. The animal seized him with its trunk, cast him to one side, and went on its way. Hurt and bruised, the disciple lay unconscious on the ground. Hearing what had happened, his teacher and his brother disciples came to him and carried him to the hermitage. With the help of some medicine he soon regained consciousness. Someone asked him, 'You knew the elephant was coming—why didn't you leave the place ?' 'But,' he said, 'our teacher has told us that God Himself has taken all these forms, of animals as well as men. Therefore, thinking it was only the elephant God that was coming, I didn't run away.' At this the teacher said : 'Yes, my child, it is true that the elephant God was coming : but the mahut God forbade you to stay there. Since all are manifestations of God, why didn't you trust the mahut's words ? You should have heeded the words of the mahut God.' (*Laughter.*)

"It is said in the scriptures that water is a form of God. But some water is fit to be used for worship, some water for washing the face, and some only

¹ Subsequently world-famous as Swami Vivekananda.

for washing plates or dirty linen. This last sort cannot be used for drinking or for a holy purpose. In like manner, God undoubtedly dwells in the hearts of all—holy and unholy, righteous and unrighteous ; but a man should not have dealings with the unholy, the wicked, the impure. He must not be intimate with them. With some of them he may exchange words, but with others he shouldn't go even that far. He should keep aloof from such people."

A DEVOTEE : "Sir, if a wicked man is about to do harm, or actually does so, should we keep quiet then ?"

MASTER : "A man living in society should make a show of tamas to protect himself from evil-minded people. But he should not harm anybody in anticipation of harm likely to be done him.

"Listen to a story. Some cowherd boys used to tend their cows in a meadow where a terrible poisonous snake lived. Everyone was on the alert for fear of it. One day a brahmachari was going along the meadow. The boys ran to him and said : 'Revered sir, please don't go that way. A venomous snake lives over there.' 'What of it, my good children ?' said the brahmachari. 'I am not afraid of the snake. I know some mantras.' So saying, he continued on his way along the meadow. But the cowherd boys, being afraid, did not accompany him. In the meantime the snake moved swiftly toward him with upraised hood. As soon as it came near, he recited a mantra, and the snake lay at his feet like an earthworm. The brahmachari said : 'Look here. Why do you go about doing harm ? Come, I will give you a holy word. By repeating it you will learn to love God. Ultimately you will realize Him and so get rid of your violent nature.' Saying this, he taught the snake a holy word and initiated him into spiritual life. The snake bowed before the teacher and said, 'Revered sir, how shall I practise spiritual discipline ?' 'Repeat that sacred word', said the teacher, 'and do no harm to anybody.' As he was about to depart, the brahmachari said, 'I shall see you again.'

"Some days passed and the cowherd boys noticed that the snake would not bite. They threw stones at it. Still it showed no anger ; it behaved as if it were an earthworm. One day one of the boys came close to it, caught it by the tail, and, whirling it round and round, dashed it again and again on the ground and threw it away. The snake vomited blood and became unconscious. It was stunned. It could not move. So, thinking it dead, the boys went their way.

"Late at night the snake regained consciousness. Slowly and with great difficulty it dragged itself into its hole ; its bones were broken and it could scarcely move. Many days passed. The snake became a mere skeleton covered with the skin. Now and then, at night, it would come out in search of food. For fear of the boys it would not leave its hole during the day-time. Since receiving the sacred word from the teacher, it had given up doing harm to others. It maintained its life on dirt, leaves, or the fruit that dropped from the trees.

"About a year later the brahmachari came that way again and asked after the snake. The cowherd boys told him that it was dead. But he couldn't believe them. He knew that the snake would not die before attaining the fruit of the holy word with which it had been initiated. He found his way to the place and, searching here and there, called it by the name he had given it.

Hearing the teacher's voice, it came out of its hole and bowed before him with great reverence. 'How are you?' asked the brahmachari. 'I am well, sir', replied the snake. 'But', the teacher asked, 'why are you so thin?' The snake replied: 'Revered sir, you ordered me not to harm anybody. So I have been living only on leaves and fruit. Perhaps that has made me thinner.'

"The snake had developed the quality of sattva; it could not be angry with anyone. It had totally forgotten that the cowherd boys had almost killed it.

The brahmachari said: 'It can't be mere want of food that has reduced you to this state. There must be some other reason. Think a little.' Then the snake remembered that the boys had dashed it against the ground. It said: 'Yes, revered sir, now I remember. The boys one day dashed me violently against the ground. They are ignorant, after all. They didn't realize what a great change had come over my mind. How could they know I wouldn't bite or harm anyone?' The brahmachari exclaimed: 'What a shame! You are such a fool! you don't know how to protect yourself. I asked you not to bite, but I didn't forbid you to hiss. Why didn't you scare them by hissing?'

"So you must hiss at wicked people. You must frighten them lest they should do you harm. But never inject your venom into them. One must not injure others.

"In this creation of God there is a variety of things: men, animals, trees, plants. Among the animals some are good, some bad. There are ferocious animals like the tiger. Some trees bear fruit sweet as nectar, and others bear fruit that is poisonous. Likewise, among human beings, there are the good and the wicked, the holy and the unholy. There are some who are devoted to God, and others who are attached to the world.

"Men may be divided into four classes: those bound by the fetters of the world, the seekers after liberation, the liberated, and the ever-free.

"Among the ever-free we may count sages like Narada. They live in the world for the good of others, to teach men spiritual truth.

"Those in bondage are sunk in worldliness and forgetful of God. Not even by mistake do they think of God.

"The seekers after liberation want to free themselves from attachment to the world. Some of them succeed and others do not.

"The liberated souls, such as the sadhus and mahatmas, are not entangled in the world, in 'woman and gold'. Their minds are free from worldliness. Besides, they always meditate on the Lotus Feet of God.

"Suppose a net has been cast into a lake to catch fish. Some fish are so clever that they are never caught in the net. They are like the ever-free. But most of the fish are entangled in the net. Some of them try to free themselves from it, and they are like those who seek liberation. But not all the fish that struggle succeed. A very few do jump out of the net, making a big splash in the water. Then the fishermen shout, 'Look! There goes a big one!' But most of the fish caught in the net cannot escape, nor do they make any effort to get out. On the contrary, they burrow into the mud with the net in their mouths and lie there quietly, thinking, 'We need not fear any more;

'we are quite safe here.' But the poor things do not know that the fishermen will drag them out with the net. These are like the men bound to the world.

"The bound souls are tied to the world by the fetters of 'woman and gold'. They are bound hand and foot. Thinking that 'woman and gold' will make them happy and give them security, they do not realize that it will lead them to annihilation. When a man thus bound to the world is about to die, his wife asks, 'You are about to go; but what have you done for me?' Again, such is his attachment to the things of the world that, when he sees the lamp burning brightly, he says : 'Dim the light. Too much oil is being used.' And he is on his death-bed !

"The bound souls never think of God. If they get any leisure they indulge in idle gossip and foolish talk, or they engage in fruitless work. If you ask one of them the reason, he answers, 'Oh, I cannot keep still; so I am making a hedge.' When time hangs heavy on their hands they perhaps start playing cards."

There was deep silence in the room.

A DEVOTEE : "Sir, is there no help, then, for such a worldly person?"

MASTER : "Certainly there is. From time to time he should live in the company of holy men, and from time to time go into solitude to meditate on God. Furthermore, he should practise discrimination and pray to God, 'Give me faith and devotion.' Once a person has faith he has achieved everything. There is nothing greater than faith.

(To Kedar) "You must have heard about the tremendous power of faith. It is said in the Purana that Rama, who was God Himself—the embodiment of Absolute Brahman—had to build a bridge to cross the sea to Ceylon. But Hanuman, trusting in Rama's name, cleared the sea in one jump and reached the other side. He had no need of a bridge. (All laugh.)

"Once a man was about to cross the sea. Bibhishana wrote Rama's name on a leaf, tied it in a corner of the man's wearing-cloth, and said to him: 'Don't be afraid. Have faith and walk on the water. But look here—the moment you lose faith you will be drowned.' The man was walking easily on the water. Suddenly he had an intense desire to see what was tied in his cloth. He opened it and found only a leaf with the name of Rama written on it. 'What is this?' he thought. 'Just the name of Rama!' As soon as doubt entered his mind he sank under the water.

"If a man has faith in God, then even if he has committed the most heinous sins—such as killing a cow, a brahmin, or a woman—he will certainly be saved through his faith. Let him only say to God, 'O Lord, I will not repeat such an action', and he need not be afraid of anything."

When he had said this, the Master sang :

If only I can pass away repeating Durga's name,
How canst Thou then, O Blessed One,
Withhold from me deliverance,
Wretched though I may be?
I may have stolen a drink of wine, or killed a child unborn.

Or slain a woman or a cow,
 Or even caused a brahmin's death :
 But, though it all be true,
 Nothing of this can make me feel the least uneasiness ;
 For through the power of Thy sweet name
 My wretched soul may still aspire
 Even to Brahmanhood.

Pointing to Narendra, the Master said : " You all see this boy. He behaves that way here. A naughty boy seems very gentle when with his father. But he is quite another person when he plays in the chandni. Narendra and people of his type belong to the class of the ever-free. They are never entangled in the world. When they grow a little older they feel the awakening of inner consciousness and go directly toward God. They come to the world only to teach others. They never care for anything of the world. They are never attached to ' woman and gold '.

" The Vedas speak of the homa bird. It lives high up in the sky and there it lays its egg. As soon as the egg is laid it begins to fall ; but it is so high up that it continues to fall for many days. As it falls it hatches, and the chick falls. As the chick falls its eyes open ; it grows wings. As soon as its eyes open, it realizes that it is falling and will be dashed to pieces on touching the earth. Then it at once shoots up toward the mother bird high in the sky."

At this point Narendra left the room: Kedar, Prankrishna, M., and many others remained.

MASTER : " You see, Narendra excels in singing, playing on instruments, study, and everything. The other day he had a discussion with Kedar and tore his arguments to shreds. (*All laugh.*)

(To M.) " Is there any book in English on reasoning ? "

M : " Yes, sir, there is. It is called Logic."

MASTER : " Tell me what it says."

M. was a little embarrassed. He said : " One part of the book deals with deduction from the general to the particular. For example : All men are mortal. Scholars are men. Therefore scholars are mortal. Another part deals with the method of reasoning from the particular to the general. For example : This crow is black. That crow is black. The crows we see everywhere are black. Therefore all crows are black. But there may be a fallacy in a conclusion arrived at in this way ; for on inquiry one may find a white crow in some country. There is another illustration : If there is rain, there is or has been a cloud. Therefore rain comes from a cloud. Still another example : This man has thirty-two teeth. That man has thirty-two teeth. All the men we see have thirty-two teeth. Therefore men have thirty-two teeth. English logic deals with such inductions and deductions."

Sri Ramakrishna barely heard these words. While listening he became absent-minded. So the conversation did not proceed far.

When the meeting broke up, the devotees sauntered in the temple garden. M. went in the direction of the Panchavati. It was about five o'clock

in the afternoon. After a while he returned to the Master's room. There, on the small north verandah, he witnessed an amazing sight.

Sri Ramakrishna was standing still, surrounded by a few devotees, and Narendra was singing. M. had never heard anyone except the Master sing so sweetly. When he looked at Sri Ramakrishna he was struck with wonder ; for the Master stood motionless, with eyes transfixed. He seemed not even to breathe. A devotee told M. that the Master was in samadhi. M. had never before seen or heard of such a thing. Silent with wonder, he thought : " Is it possible for a man to be so oblivious of the outer world in the consciousness of God ? How deep his faith and devotion must be to bring about such a state ! "

Narendra was singing :

Meditate, O my mind, on the Lord Hari,
The Stainless One, Pure Spirit through and through.
How peerless is the Light that in Him shines !
How soul-bewitching is His wondrous form !
How dear is He to all His devotees !

Ever more beauteous in fresh-blossoming love
That shames the splendour of a million moons,
Like lightning gleams the glory of His form,
Raising erect the hair for very joy.

The Master shuddered when this last line was sung. His hair stood on end, and tears of joy streamed down his cheeks. Now and then his lips parted in a smile. Was he seeing the peerless beauty of God, "that shames the splendour of a million moons" ? Was this the vision of God, the Essence of Spirit ? How much austerity and discipline, how much faith and devotion, must be necessary for such a vision !

The song went on :

Worship His feet in the lotus of your heart ;
With mind serene and eyes made radiant
With heavenly love, behold that matchless sight.

Again that bewitching smile. The body motionless as before, the eyes half shut, as if beholding a strange inner vision.

The song drew to a close. Narendra sang the last lines :

Caught in the spell of His love's ecstasy,
Immerse yourself for evermore, O mind,
In Him who is Pure Knowledge and Pure Bliss.

This sight of the samadhi, and the divine bliss he had witnessed, left an indelible impression on M.'s mind. He returned home deeply moved. Now and then he could hear within himself the echo of those soul-intoxicating lines :

Immerse yourself for evermore, O mind,
In Him who is Pure Knowledge and Pure Bliss.

The next day, too, was a holiday for M. He arrived at Dakshineswar at three o'clock in the afternoon. Sri Ramakrishna was in his room ; Narendra,

Bhavanath, and a few other devotees were sitting on a mat spread on the floor. They were all young men of nineteen or twenty. Seated on the small couch, Sri Ramakrishna was talking with them and smiling.

No sooner had M. entered the room than the Master laughed aloud and said to the boys, "There ! He has come again." They all joined in the laughter. M. bowed low before him and took a seat. Before this he had saluted the Master with folded hands, like one with an English education. But that day he learnt to fall down at his feet in orthodox Hindu fashion.

Presently the Master explained the cause of his laughter to the devotees. He said : "A man once fed a peacock with a pill of opium at four o'clock in the afternoon. The next day, exactly at that time, the peacock came back. It had felt the intoxication of the drug and returned just in time to have another dose." (All laugh.)

M. thought this a very apt illustration. Even at home he had been unable to banish the thought of Sri Ramakrishna for a moment. His mind was constantly at Dakshineswar and he had counted the minutes until he should go again.

In the mean time the Master was having great fun with the boys, treating them as if they were his most intimate friends. Peals of side-splitting laughter filled the room, as if it were a mart of joy. The whole thing was a revelation to M. He thought : " Didn't I see him only yesterday intoxicated with God ? Wasn't he swimming then in the Ocean of Divine Love—a sight I had never seen before ? And today the same person is behaving like an ordinary man ! Wasn't it he who scolded me on the first day of my coming here ? Didn't he admonish me, saying, ' And you are a man of knowledge ! ' ? Wasn't it he who said to me that God with form is as true as God without form ? Didn't he tell me that God alone is real and all else illusory ? Wasn't it he who advised me to live in the world unattached, like a maidservant in a rich man's house ? "

Sri Ramakrishna was having great fun with the young devotees ; now and then he glanced at M. He noticed that M. sat in silence. The Master said to Ramlal : " You see, he is a little advanced in years, and therefore somewhat serious. He sits quiet while the youngsters are making merry." M. was then about twenty-eight years old.

The conversation drifted to Hanuman, whose picture hung on the wall in the Master's room.

Sri Ramakrishna said : " Just imagine Hanuman's state of mind. He didn't care for money, honour, creature comforts, or anything else. He longed only for God. When he was running away with the heavenly weapon that had been secreted in the crystal pillar, Mandodari began to tempt him with various fruits so that he might come down and drop the weapon.⁵ But he couldn't be tricked so easily. In reply to her persuasions he sang this song :

⁵ The story referred to here is told in the *Ramayana*. Ravana had received a boon as a result of which he could be killed only by a particular celestial weapon. This weapon was concealed in a crystal pillar in his palace. One day Hanuman, in the guise of an ordinary monkey, came to the palace and broke the pillar. As he was running away with the weapon, he was tempted with fruit by Mandodari, Ravana's wife, so that he might give back the weapon. He soon assumed his own form and sang the song given in the text.

Am I in need of fruit ?
 I have the Fruit that makes this life
 Fruitful indeed. Within my heart
 The Tree of Rama grows,
 Bearing salvation for its fruit.

Under the Wish-fulfilling Tree
 Of Rama do I sit at ease,
 Plucking whatever fruit I will.
 But if you speak of fruit—
 No beggar, I, for common fruit.
 Behold, I go,
 Leaving a bitter fruit for you."

As Sri Ramakrishna was singing the song he went into samadhi. Again the half-closed eyes and motionless body that one sees in his photograph. Just a minute before, the devotees had been making merry in his company. Now all eyes were riveted on him. Thus for the second time M. saw the Master in samadhi.

After a long time the Master came back to ordinary consciousness. His face lighted up with a smile, and his body relaxed ; his senses began to function in a normal way. He shed tears of joy as he repeated the holy name of Rama. M. wondered whether this very saint was the person who a few minutes earlier had been behaving like a child of five.

The Master said to Narendra and M., "I should like to hear you speak and argue in English." They both laughed. But they continued to talk in their mother tongue. It was impossible for M. to argue any more before the Master. Though Sri Ramakrishna insisted, they did not talk in English.

At five o'clock in the afternoon all the devotees except Narendra and M. took leave of the Master. As M. was walking in the temple garden, he suddenly came upon the Master talking to Narendra on the bank of the goose-pond. Sri Ramakrishna said to Narendra : "Look here. Come a little more often. You are a new-comer. On first acquaintance people visit each other quite often, as is the case with a lover and his sweetheart. (Narendra and M. laugh.) So please come, won't you ?"

Narendra, a member of the Brahmo Samaj, was very particular about his promises. He said with a smile, "Yes, sir, I shall try."

As they were returning to the Master's room, Sri Ramakrishna said to M. : "When peasants go to market to buy bullocks for their ploughs, they can easily tell the good from the bad by touching their tails. On being touched there, some meekly lie down on the ground. The peasants recognize that these are without mettle and so reject them. They select only those bullocks that frisk about and show spirit when their tails are touched. Narendra is like a bullock of this latter class. He is full of spirit within."

The Master smiled as he said this, and continued : "There are some people who have no grit whatever. They are like flattened rice soaked in milk — soft and mushy. No inner strength !"

It was dusk. The Master was meditating on God. He said to M. : "Go and talk to Narendra. Then tell me what you think of him."

Con-

Evening worship was over in the temples. M. met Narendra on the bank of the Ganges and they began to converse. Narendra told M. about his studying in college, his being a member of the Brahmo Samaj, and so on.

It was now late in the evening and time for M.'s departure; but he felt reluctant to go and instead went in search of Sri Ramakrishna. He had been fascinated by the Master's singing and wanted to hear more. At last he found the Master pacing alone in the natmandir in front of the Kali temple. A lamp was burning in the temple on either side of the image of the Divine Mother. The single lamp in the spacious natmandir blended light and darkness into a kind of mystic twilight, in which the figure of the Master could be dimly seen.

M. had been enchanted by the Master's sweet music. With some hesitation he asked him whether there would be any more singing that evening. "No, not tonight", said Sri Ramakrishna after a little reflection. Then, as if remembering something, he added: "But I'm going soon to Balaram Bose's house in Calcutta. Come there and you'll hear me sing." M. agreed to go.

MASTER : "Do you know Balaram Bose ?"

M : "No, sir, I don't."

MASTER : He lives in Bosepara."

M : "Well, sir, I shall find him."

As Sri Ramakrishna walked up and down the hall with M., he said to him: "Let me ask you something. What do you think of me ?"

M. remained silent. Again Sri Ramakrishna asked: "What do you think of me ? [How many annas of knowledge of God have I ?]

M : "I don't understand what you mean by 'annas'. But of this I am sure: I have never before seen such knowledge, ecstatic love, faith in God, renunciation, and catholicity anywhere."

The Master laughed.

M. bowed low before him and took his leave. He had gone as far as the main gate of the temple garden when he suddenly remembered something and came back to Sri Ramakrishna, who was still in the natmandir. In the dim light the Master, all alone, was pacing the hall, rejoicing in the Self--as the lion lives and roams alone in the forest.

In silent wonder M. surveyed that great soul.

MASTER (to M.) : "What makes you come back ?"

M : "Perhaps the house you asked me to go to belongs to a rich man. They may not let me in. I think I had better not go. I would rather meet you here."

MASTER : "Oh, no ! Why should you think that ? Just mention my name. Say that you want to see me; then someone will take you to me."

M. nodded his assent and, after saluting the Master, took his leave.

II

IN THE COMPANY OF DEVOTEES

March 11, 1882
12345

ABOUT EIGHT O'CLOCK in the morning Sri Ramakrishna went as planned to Balaram Bose's house in Calcutta. It was the day of the Dolayatra. Ram, Manomohan, Rakhal,¹ Nityagopal, and other devotees were with him. M., too, came, as bidden by the Master.

The devotees and the Master sang and danced in a state of divine fervour. Several of them were in an ecstatic mood. Nityagopal's chest glowed with the upsurge of emotion, and Rakhal lay on the floor in ecstasy, completely unconscious of the world. The Master put his hand on Rakhal's chest and said : "Peace. Be quiet." This was Rakhal's first experience of ecstasy. He lived with his father in Calcutta and now and then visited the Master at Dakshineswar. About this time he had studied a short while in Vidyasagar's school at Syampukur.

When the music was over, the devotees sat down for their meal. Balaram stood there humbly, like a servant. Nobody would have taken him for the master of the house. M. was still a stranger to the devotees, having met only Narendra at Dakshineswar.

A few days later M. visited the Master at Dakshineswar. It was between four and five o'clock in the afternoon. The Master and he were sitting on the steps of the Siva temples. Looking at the temple of Radhakanta, across the courtyard, the Master went into an ecstatic mood.

Since his nephew Hriday's dismissal from the temple, Sri Ramakrishna had been living without an attendant. On account of his frequent spiritual moods he could hardly take care of himself. The lack of an attendant caused him great inconvenience.

Sri Ramakrishna was talking to Kali, the Divine Mother of the Universe. He said : "Mother, everyone says, 'My watch alone is right.' The Christians, the Brahmos, the Hindus, the Mussalmans, all say, 'My religion alone is true.' But, Mother, the fact is that nobody's watch is right. Who can truly understand Thee? But if a man prays to Thee with a yearning heart, he can reach Thee, through Thy grace, by any path. Mother, show me some time how the Christians pray to Thee in their churches. But Mother, what

¹ A beloved disciple of the Master, later known as Swami Brahmananda.

will people say if I go in? Suppose they make a fuss! Suppose they don't allow me to enter the Kali temple again! Well then, show me the Christian worship from the door of the church."

Another day the Master was seated on the small couch in his room, with his usual beaming countenance. M. arrived with Kalikrishna, who did not know where his friend M. was taking him. He had only been told: "If you want to see a grog-shop, then come with me. You will see a huge jar of wine there." M. related this to Sri Ramakrishna, who laughed about it. The Master said: "The bliss of worship and communion with God is the true wine, the wine of ecstatic love. The goal of human life is to love God. Bhakti is the one essential thing. To know God through jnana and reasoning is extremely difficult."

Then the Master sang:

Who is there that can understand what Mother Kali is?
Even the six darsanas are powerless to reveal Her. . . .

The Master said, again: "The one goal of life is to cultivate love for God, the love that the milkmaids, the milkmen, and the cowherd boys of Vrindavan felt for Krishna. When Krishna went away to Mathura, the cowherds roamed about weeping bitterly because of their separation from Him."

Saying this the Master sang, with his eyes turned upward:

Just now I saw a youthful cowherd
With a young calf in his arms;
There he stood, by one hand holding
The branch of a young tree.
"Where are You, Brother Kanai?" he cried;
But "Kanai" scarcely could he utter;
"Ka" was as much as he could say.
He cried, "Where are You, Brother?"
And his eyes were filled with tears.

When M. heard this song of the Master's, laden with love, his eyes were moist with tears.

April 2, 1882

Sri Ramakrishna was sitting in the drawing-room of Keshab Chandra Sen's house in Calcutta; it was five o'clock in the afternoon. When Keshab was told of his arrival, he came to the drawing-room dressed to go out, for he was about to call on a sick friend. Now he cancelled his plan. The Master said to him: "You have so many things to attend to. Besides, you have to edit a newspaper. You have no time to come to Dakshineswar; so I have come to see you. When I heard of your illness I vowed green coconut and sugar to the Divine Mother for your recovery. I said to Her, 'Mother, if something happens to Keshab, with whom shall I talk in Calcutta?'"

Sri Ramakrishna spoke to Pratap and the other Brahmo devotees. M. was seated near by. Pointing to him, the Master said to Keshab: "Will you please ask him why he doesn't come to Dakshineswar any more? He repeatedly tells me he is not attached to his wife and children." M. had been

paying visits to the Master for about a month ; his absence for a time from Dakshineswar called forth this remark. Sri Ramakrishna had asked M. to write to him, if his coming were delayed.

Pundit Samadhyayi was present. The Brahmo devotees introduced him to Sri Ramakrishna as a scholar well versed in the Vedas and the other scriptures. The Master said, "Yes, I can see inside him through his eyes, as one can see the objects in a room through the glass door."

Trailokya sang. Suddenly the Master stood up and went into samadhi, repeating the Mother's name. Coming down a little to the plane of sense consciousness, he danced and sang :

I drink no ordinary wine, but Wine of Everlasting Bliss,
As I repeat my Mother Kali's name :
It so intoxicates my mind that people take me to be drunk !
First my guru gives molasses for the making of the Wine :
My longing is the ferment to transform it.
Knowledge, the maker of the Wine, prepares it for me then :
And when it is done, my mind imbibes it from the bottle of the
mantra,
Taking the Mother's name to make it pure.
Drink of this Wine, says Ramprasad,² and the four fruits³ of life
are yours.

The Master looked at Keshab tenderly, as if Keshab were his very own. He seemed to fear that Keshab might belong to someone else, that is to say, that he might become a worldly person. Looking at him, the Master sang again :

We are afraid to speak, and yet we are afraid to keep still ;
Our minds, O Radha, half believe that we are about to lose you !
We tell you the secret that we know—
The secret whereby we ourselves, and others, with our help,
Have passed through many a time of peril :
Now it all depends on you.

Quoting the last part of the song, he said to Keshab : "That is to say, renounce everything and call on God. He alone is real ; all else is illusory. Without the realization of God everything is futile. This is the great secret."

The Master sat down again and began to converse with the devotees. For a while he listened to a piano recital, enjoying it like a child. Then he was taken to the inner apartments, where he was served with refreshments and the ladies saluted him.

As the master was leaving Keshab's house, the Brahmo devotees accompanied him respectfully to his carriage.

Sunday, April 9, 1882

Sri Ramakrishna was seated with his devotees in the drawing-room of Prankrishna Mukherji's house in Calcutta : it was between one and two

² The author of the song. It is customary for writers of devotional songs in India to mention their names at the end of their songs.

³ Dharma, artha, kama, and moksha.

o'clock in the afternoon. Since Colonel Viswanath¹ lived in that neighbourhood, the Master intended to visit him before going to see Keshab at the Lily Cottage. A number of neighbours and other friends of Prankrishna had been invited to meet Sri Ramakrishna. They were all eager to hear his words.

MASTER : "God and His glory. This universe is His glory. People see His glory and forget everything. They do not seek God, whose glory is this world. All seek to enjoy 'woman and gold'. But there is too much misery and worry in that. This world is like the whirlpool of the Visalakshi.² Once a boat gets into it there is no hope of its rescue. Again, the world is like a thorny bush : you have hardly freed yourself from one set of thorns before you find yourself entangled in another. Once you enter a labyrinth you find it very difficult to get out. Living in the world, a man becomes seared, as it were."

A DEVOTEE : "Then what is the way, sir ?"

MASTER : "Prayer and the company of holy men. You cannot get rid of an ailment without the help of a physician. But it is not enough to be in the company of religious people only for a day. You should constantly seek it, for the disease has become chronic. Again, you can't understand the pulse rightly unless you live with a physician. Moving with him constantly, you learn to distinguish between the pulse of phlegm and the pulse of bile."

DEVOTEE : "What is the good of holy company ?"

MASTER : "It begets yearning for God. It begets love of God. Nothing whatsoever is achieved in spiritual life without yearning. By constantly living in the company of holy men, the soul becomes restless for God. This yearning is like the state of mind of a man who has someone ill in the family. His mind is in a state of perpetual restlessness, thinking how the sick person may be cured. Or again, one should feel a yearning for God like the yearning of a man who has lost his job and is wandering from one office to another in search of work. If he is rejected at a certain place which has no vacancy, he goes there again the next day and inquires, 'Is there any vacancy today ?'

'There is another way : earnestly praying to God. God is our very own. We should say to Him : 'O God, what is Thy nature ? Reveal Thyself to me. Thou must show Thyself to me ; for why else hast Thou created me ?' Some Sikh devotees once said to me, 'God is full of compassion.' I said : 'But why should we call Him compassionate ? He is our Creator. What is there to be wondered at if He is kind to us ? Parents bring up their children. Do you call that an act of kindness ? They must act that way.' Therefore we should force our demands on God. He is our Father and Mother, isn't He ? If the son demands his patrimony and gives up food and drink in order to enforce his demand, then the parents hand his share over to him three years before the legal time. Or when the child demands some pice from

¹The Resident of the Nepalese Government in Calcutta, and a devotee of the Master.

²A stream near Sri Ramakrishna's birth-place.

his mother, and says over and over again : ' Mother, give me a couple of pice. I beg you on my knees ! '—then the mother, seeing his earnestness, and unable to bear it any more, tosses the money to him.

" There is another benefit from holy company. It helps one cultivate discrimination between the Real and the unreal. God alone is the Real, that is to say, the Eternal Substance, and the world is unreal, that is to say, transitory. As soon as a man finds his mind wandering away to the unreal, he should apply discrimination. The moment an elephant stretches out its trunk to eat a plantain-tree in a neighbour's garden, it gets a blow from the iron goad of the driver."

NEIGHBOUR : " Why does a man have sinful tendencies ? "

MASTER : " In God's creation there are all sorts of things. He has created bad men as well as good men. It is He who gives us good tendencies, and it is He again who gives us evil tendencies."

NEIGHBOUR : " In that case we aren't responsible for our sinful actions, are we ? "

MASTER : " Sin begets its own result. This is God's law. Won't you burn your tongue if you chew a chilli ? In his youth Mathur led a rather fast life ; so he suffered from various diseases before his death.

" One may not realize this in youth. I have looked into the hearth in the kitchen of the Kali temple when logs are being burnt. At first the wet wood burns rather well. It doesn't seem then that it contains much moisture. But when the wood is sufficiently burnt, all the moisture runs back to one end. At last water squirts from the fuel and puts out the fire.

" So one should be careful about anger, passion, and greed. Take, for instance, the case of Hanuman. In a fit of anger he burnt Ceylon. At last he remembered that Sita was living in the asoka grove. Then he began to tremble lest the fire should injure her."

NEIGHBOUR : " Why has God created wicked people ? "

MASTER : " That is His will, His play. In His maya there exists avidya as well as vidya. Darkness is needed too. It reveals all the more the glory of light. There is no doubt that anger, lust, and greed are evils. Why, then, has God created them ? In order to create saints. A man becomes a saint by conquering the senses. Is there anything impossible for a man who has subdued his passions ? He can even realize God, through His grace. Again, see how His whole play of creation is perpetuated through lust.

" Wicked people are needed too. At one time the tenants of an estate became unruly. The landlord had to send Golak Choudhury, who was a ruffian. He was such a harsh administrator that the tenants trembled at the very mention of his name.

" There is need of everything. Once Sita said to her Husband : ' Rama, it would be grand if every house in Ayodhya were a mansion ! I find many houses old and dilapidated.' ' But, my dear,' said Rama, if all the houses were beautiful ones, what would the masons do ? ' (Laughter.) God has created

¹ The son-in-law of Rani Rasmani, and a great devotee of Sri Ramakrishna, whom he provided with all the necessities of life at the temple garden.

all kinds of things. He has created good trees, and poisonous plants and weeds as well. Among the animals there are good, bad, and all kinds of creatures—tigers, lions, snakes, and so on."

NEIGHBOUR : "Sir, is it ever possible to realize God while leading the life of a householder ?".

MASTER : "Certainly. But as I said just now, one must live in holy company and pray unceasingly. One should weep for God. When the impurities of the mind are thus washed away, one realizes God. The mind is like a needle covered with mud, and God is like a magnet. The needle cannot be united with the magnet unless it is free from mud. Tears wash away the mud, which is nothing but lust, anger, greed, and other evil tendencies, and the inclination to worldly enjoyments as well. As soon as the mud is washed away, the magnet attracts the needle, that is to say, man realizes God. Only the pure in heart see God. A fever patient has an excess of the watery element in his system. What can quinine do for him unless that is removed ?

"Why shouldn't one realize God while living in the world ? But, as I said, one must live in holy company, pray to God, weeping for His grace, and now and then go into solitude. Unless the plants on a foot-path are protected at first by fences, they are destroyed by cattle."

NEIGHBOUR : "Then householders, too, will have the vision of God, won't they ?"

MASTER : "Everybody will surely be liberated. But one should follow the instructions of the guru ; if one follows a devious path, one will suffer in trying to retrace one's steps. It takes a long time to achieve liberation. A man may fail to obtain it in this life. Perhaps he will realize God only after many births. Sages like Janaka performed worldly duties. They performed them, bearing God in their minds, as a dancing-girl dances, keeping jars or trays on her head. Haven't you seen how the women in northwest India walk, talking and laughing while carrying water-pitchers on their heads ?"

NEIGHBOUR : "You just referred to the instructions of the guru. How shall we find him ?"

MASTER : "Anyone and everyone cannot be a guru. A huge timber floats on the water and can carry animals as well. But a piece of worthless wood sinks, if a man sits on it, and drowns him. Therefore in every age God incarnates Himself as the guru, to teach humanity. Satchidananda alone is the guru.

"What is knowledge ? And what is the nature of this ego ? 'God alone is the Doer, and none else'—that is knowledge. I am not the doer ; I am a mere instrument in His hand. Therefore I say : 'O Mother, Thou art the Operator and I am the machine. Thou art the Indweller and I am the house. Thou art the Driver and I am the carriage. I move as Thou movest me. I do as Thou makest me do. I speak as Thou makest me speak. Not I, not I, but Thou, but Thou.' "

From Prankrishna's house the Master went to Colonel Viswanath's and from there to the Lily Cottage. *3.3.45*

III

VISIT TO VIDYASAGAR

August 5, 1882
4-3-665

PUNDIT ISWAR CHANDRA VIDYASAGAR was born in the village of Beersingh, not far from Kamarpukur, Sri Ramakrishna's birth-place. He was known as a great scholar, educator, writer, and philanthropist. One of the creators of modern Bengali, he was also well versed in Sanskrit grammar and poetry. His generosity made his name a household word with his countrymen, most of his income being given in charity to widows, orphans, indigent students, and other needy people. Nor was his compassion limited to human beings : he stopped drinking milk for years so that the calves should not be deprived of it, and he would not drive in a carriage for fear of causing discomfort to the horses. He was a man of indomitable spirit, which he showed when he gave up the lucrative position of principal of the Sanskrit College of Calcutta because of a disagreement with the authorities. His affection for his mother was especially deep. One day, in the absence of a ferry-boat, he swam a raging river at the risk of his life to fulfil her wish that he should be present at his brother's wedding. His whole life was one of utter simplicity. The title Vidyasagar, meaning "Ocean of Learning", was given him in recognition of his vast erudition.

Sri Ramakrishna had long wanted to visit Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar. Learning from M. that he was a teacher at Vidyasagar's school, the Master asked : "Can you take me to Vidyasagar ? I should like very much to see him." M. told Iswar Chandra of Sri Ramakrishna's wish, and the pundit gladly agreed that M. should bring the Master, some Saturday afternoon at four o'clock. He only asked M. what kind of paramahamsa the Master was, saying, "Does he wear an ochre cloth?" M. answered : "No, sir. He is an unusual person. He wears a red-bordered cloth and polished slippers. He lives in a room in Rani Rasmani's temple garden. In his room there is a couch with a mattress and mosquito net. He has no outer indication of holiness. But he doesn't know anything except God. Day and night he thinks of God alone."

On the afternoon of August 5 the Master left Dakshineswar in a hackney carriage, accompanied by Bhavanath, M., and Hazra. Vidyasagar lived in Badurbagan, in central Calcutta, about six miles from Dakshineswar. On the way Sri Ramakrishna talked with his companions ; but as the carriage neared Vidyasagar's house his mood suddenly changed. He was overpowered with

divine ecstasy. Not noticing this, M. pointed out the garden house where Raja Rammohan Roy had lived. The Master was annoyed and said, "I don't care about such things now." He was going into an ecstatic state.

The carriage stopped in front of Vidyasagar's house. The Master alighted, supported by M., who then led the way. In the courtyard were many flowering plants. As the Master walked to the house he said to M., like a child, pointing to his shirt-button : "My shirt is unbuttoned. Will that offend Vidyasagar ?" "Oh, no!" said M. "Don't be anxious about it. Nothing about you will be offensive. You don't have to button your shirt." He accepted the assurance simply, like a child.

Vidyasagar was about sixty-two years old, sixteen or seventeen years older than the Master. He lived in a two-storey house built in the English fashion, with lawns on all sides and surrounded by a high wall. After climbing the stairs to the second floor, Sri Ramakrishna and his devotees entered a room at the far end of which Vidyasagar was seated facing them, with a table in front of him. To the right of the table was a bench. Some friends of their host occupied chairs on the other two sides.

Vidyasagar rose to receive the Master. Sri Ramakrishna stood in front of the bench, with one hand resting on the table. He gazed at Vidyasagar, as if they had known each other before, and smiled in an ecstatic mood. In that mood he remained standing a few minutes. Now and then, to bring his mind back to normal consciousness, he said, "I shall have a drink of water."

In the mean time the young members of the household and a few friends and relatives of Vidyasagar had gathered around. Sri Ramakrishna, still in an ecstatic mood, sat on the bench. A young man, seventeen or eighteen years old, who had come to Vidyasagar to seek financial help for his education, was seated there. The Master sat down at a little distance from the boy, saying in an abstracted mood : "Mother, this boy is very much attached to the world.
He belongs to Thy realm of ignorance."

Vidyasagar told someone to bring water and asked M. whether the Master would like some sweetmeats also. Since M. did not object, Vidyasagar himself went eagerly to the inner apartments and brought the sweets. They were placed before the Master. Bhavanath and Hazra also received their share. When they were offered to M., Vidyasagar said : "Oh, he is like one of the family. We needn't worry about him." Referring to a young devotee, the Master said to Vidyasagar : "He is a nice young man and is sound at the core. He is like the river Phalgu. The surface is covered with sand ; but if you dig a little you will find water flowing underneath."

After taking some of the sweets, the Master, with a smile, began to speak to Vidyasagar. Meanwhile the room had become filled with people ; some were standing and others were seated.

MASTER : "Ah ! Today, at last, I have come to the ocean. Up till now I have seen only canals, marshes, or a river at the most. But today I am face to face with the sagar, the ocean." (All laugh.)

VIDYASAGAR (smiling) : "Then please take home some salt water." (Laughter.)

• MASTER : " Oh, no ! Why salt water ? You aren't the ocean of ignorance. You are the ocean of vidya, knowledge. You are the ocean of condensed milk." (All laugh.)

VIDYASAGAR : " Well, you may put it that way."

The pundit became silent. Sri Ramakrishna said : " Your activities are inspired by sattva. Though they are rajasic, they are influenced by sattva. Compassion springs from sattva. Though work for the good of others belongs to rajas, yet this rajas has sattva for its basis and is not harmful. Suka and other sages cherished compassion in their minds to give people religious instruction, to teach them about God. You are distributing food and learning. That is good too. If these activities are done in a selfless spirit they lead to God. But most people work for fame or to acquire merit. Their activities are not selfless. Besides, you are already a siddha."¹

VIDYASAGAR : " How is that sir ? "

MASTER (laughing) : " When potatoes and other vegetables are well cooked, they become soft and tender. And you possess such a tender nature ! You are so compassionate ! " (Laughter.)

VIDYASAGAR (laughing) : " But when the paste of kalai pulse is boiled it becomes all the harder."

MASTER : " But you don't belong to that class. Mere pundits are like diseased fruit that becomes hard and will not ripen at all. Such fruit has neither the freshness of green fruit nor the flavour of ripe. Vultures soar very high in the sky, but their eyes are fixed on rotten carrion on the ground. The book-learned are reputed to be wise, but they are attached to ' woman and gold '. Like the vultures, they are in search of carrion. They are attached to the world of ignorance. Compassion, love of God, and renunciation are the glories of true knowledge."

Vidyasagar listened to these words in silence. The others, too, gazed at the Master and were attentive to every word he said.

Vidyasagar was very reticent about giving religious instruction to others. He had studied Hindu philosophy. Once, when M. had asked him his opinion of it, Vidyasagar had said, " I think the philosophers have failed to explain what was in their minds." But in his daily life he followed all the rituals of Hindu religion and wore the sacred thread of a brahmin. About God he had once declared : " It is indeed impossible to know Him. What, then, should be our duty ? It seems to me that we should live in such a way that, if others followed our example, this very earth would be heaven. Everyone should try to do good to the world."

Sri Ramakrishna's conversation now turned to the Knowledge of Brahman.

MASTER : " Brahman is beyond vidya and avidya, knowledge and ignorance. It is beyond maya, the illusion of duality.

" The world consists of the illusory duality of knowledge and ignorance. It contains knowledge and devotion, and also attachment to ' woman and

¹ Literally, " perfect " or " boiled " ; the word is applied both to the perfected soul and to boiled things.

gold': righteousness and unrighteousness; good and evil. But Brahman is unattached to these. Good and evil apply to the jiva, the individual soul, as do righteousness and unrighteousness; but Brahman is not at all affected by them.

"One man may read the *Bhagavata* by the light of a lamp, and another may commit a forgery by that very light; but the lamp is unaffected. The sun sheds its light on the wicked as well as on the virtuous.

"You may ask, 'How, then, can one explain misery and sin and unhappiness?' The answer is that these apply only to the jiva. Brahman is unaffected by them. There is poison in a snake; but though others may die if bitten by it, the snake itself is not affected by the poison.

"What Brahman is cannot be described. All things in the world—the Vedas, the Puranas, the Tantras, the six systems of philosophy—have been defiled, like food that has been touched by the tongue, for they have been read or uttered by the tongue. Only one thing has not been defiled in this way, and that is Brahman. No one has ever been able to say what Brahman is."

VIDYASAGAR (*to his friends*): "Oh! That is a remarkable statement. I have learnt something new today."

MASTER: "A man had two sons. The father sent them to a preceptor to learn the Knowledge of Brahman. After a few years they returned from their preceptor's house and bowed low before their father. Wanting to measure the depth of their knowledge of Brahman, he first questioned the older of the two boys. 'My child,' he said, 'you have studied all the scriptures. Now tell me, what is the nature of Brahman?' The boy began to explain Brahman by reciting various texts from the Vedas. The father did not say anything. Then he asked the younger son the same question. But the boy remained silent and stood with eyes cast down. No word escaped his lips. The father was pleased and said to him: 'My child, you have understood a little of Brahman. What it is cannot be expressed in words.'

"Men often think they have understood Brahman fully. Once an ant went to a hill of sugar. One grain filled its stomach. Taking another grain in its mouth it started homeward. On its way it thought, 'Next time I shall carry home the whole hill.' That is the way shallow minds think. They don't know that Brahman is beyond one's words and thought. However great a man may be, how much can he know of Brahman? Sukadeva and sages like him may have been big ants; but even they could carry at the utmost eight or ten grains of sugar!"

"As for what has been said in the Vedas and the Puranas, do you know what it is like? Suppose a man has seen the ocean, and somebody asks him, 'Well, what is the ocean like?' The first man opens his mouth as wide as he can and says: 'What a sight! What tremendous waves and sounds!' The description of Brahman in the sacred books is like that. It is said in the Vedas that Brahman is of the nature of Bliss—it is Satchidananda.

"Suka and other sages stood on the shore of this Ocean of Brahman and saw and touched the water. According to one school of thought they never plunged into it. Those who do, cannot come back to the world again.

• "In samadhi one attains the Knowledge of Brahman—one realizes Brahman. In that state reasoning stops altogether, and man becomes mute. He has no power to describe the nature of Brahman.

"Once a salt doll went to measure the depth of the ocean. (*All laugh.*) It wanted to tell others how deep the water was. But this it could never do, for no sooner did it get into the water than it melted. Now who was there to report the ocean's depth?"

A DEVOTEE : "Suppose a man has obtained the Knowledge of Brahman in samadhi. Doesn't he speak any more?"

MASTER : "Sankaracharya² retained the 'ego of Knowledge' in order to teach others. After the vision of Brahman a man becomes silent. He reasons about It as long as he has not realized It. If you heat butter in a pan on the stove, it makes a sizzling sound as long as the water it contains has not dried up. But when no trace of water is left the clarified butter makes no sound. If you put an uncooked cake of flour in that butter it sizzles again. But after the cake is cooked all sound stops. Just so, a man established in samadhi comes down to the relative plane of consciousness in order to teach others, and then he talks about God."

"The bee buzzes as long as it is not sitting on a flower. It becomes silent when it begins to sip the honey. But sometimes, intoxicated with the honey, it buzzes again."

"An empty pitcher makes a gurgling sound when it is dipped in water. When it fills up it becomes silent. (*All laugh.*) But if the water is poured from it into another pitcher, then you will hear the sound again. (*Laughter.*)

"The rishis of old attained the Knowledge of Brahman. One cannot have this so long as there is the slightest trace of worldliness. How hard the rishis laboured! Early in the morning they would go away from the hermitage, and would spend the whole day in solitude, meditating on Brahman. At night they would return to the hermitage and eat a little fruit or roots. They kept their minds aloof from the objects of sight, hearing, touch, and other things of a worldly nature. Only thus did they realize Brahman as their own inner consciousness."

"But in the Kaliyuga, man, being totally dependent on food for life, cannot altogether shake off the idea that he is the body. In this state of mind it is not proper for him to say, 'I am He.' When a man does all sorts of worldly things, he should not say, 'I am Brahman.' Those who cannot give up attachment to worldly things, and who find no means to shake off the feeling of 'I', should rather cherish the idea, 'I am God's servant; I am His devotee.' One can also realize God by following the path of devotion."

"The jnani gives up his identification with worldly things, discriminating, 'Not this, not this'. Only then can he realize Brahman. It is like reaching the roof of a house by leaving the steps behind, one by one. But the vijnani, who is more intimately acquainted with Brahman, realizes something more. He realizes that the steps are made of the same materials as the roof: bricks,

² One of the greatest philosophers of India.

lime, and brick-dust. That which is realized intuitively as Brahman, through the eliminating process of 'Not this, not this', is then found to have become the universe and all its living beings. The vijnani sees that the Reality which is nirguna, without attributes, is also saguna, with attributes.

"A man cannot live on the roof a long time. He comes down again. Those who realize Brahman in samadhi come down also and find that it is Brahman that has become the universe and its living beings. In the musical scale there are the notes sa, re, ga, ma, pa, dha, and ni ; but one cannot keep one's voice on 'ni' a long time. The ego does not vanish altogether. The man coming down from samadhi perceives that it is Brahman that has become the ego, the universe, and all living beings. This is known as vijnana.

"The path of knowledge leads to Truth, as does the path that combines knowledge and love. The path of love, too, leads to this goal. The way of love is as true as the way of knowledge. All paths ultimately lead to the same Truth. But as long as God keeps the feeling of ego in us, it is easier to follow the path of love.

"The vijnani sees that Brahman is immovable and actionless, like Mount Sumeru. This universe consists of the three gunas—sattva, rajas, and tamas. They are in Brahman. But Brahman is unattached.

"The vijnani further sees that what is Brahman is the Bhagavan, the Personal God. He who is beyond the three gunas is the Bhagavan, with His six supernatural powers. Living beings, the universe, mind, intelligence, love, renunciation, knowledge—all these are the manifestations of His power. (With a laugh) If an aristocrat has neither house nor property, or if he has been forced to sell them, one doesn't call him an aristocrat any more. (All laugh.) God is endowed with the six supernatural powers. If He were not, who would obey Him ? (All laugh.)

"Just see how picturesque this universe is ! How many things there are ! The sun, moon, and stars ; and how many varieties of living beings !—big and small, good and bad, strong and weak—some endowed with more power, some with less."

'VIDYASAGAR : "Has He endowed some with more power and others with less ? "

MASTER : As the All-pervading Spirit He exists in all beings, even in the ant. But the manifestations of His Power are different in different beings ; otherwise, how can one person put ten to flight, while another can't face even one ? And why do all people respect you ? Have you grown a pair of horns ? (Laughter.) You have more compassion and learning. Therefore people honour you and come to pay you their respects. Don't you agree with me ? "

Vidyasagar smiled.

The Master continued : "There is nothing in mere scholarship. The object of study is to find means of knowing God and realizing Him. A holy man had a book. When asked what it contained, he opened it and showed that on all the pages were written the words 'Om Rama', and nothing else.

"What is the significance of the *Gita* ? It is what you find by repeating the word ten times. It is then reversed into '*tagi*', which means a person who

has renounced everything for God. And the lesson of the *Gita* is : 'O man, renounce everything and seek God alone.' Whether a man is a monk or a house-holder, he has to shake off all attachment from his mind.

" Chaitanyaadeva set out on a pilgrimage to southern India. One day he saw a man reading the *Gita*. Another man, seated at a distance, was listening and weeping. His eyes were swimming in tears. Chaitanyaadeva asked him, 'Do you understand all this ?' The man said, 'No, revered sir, I don't understand a word of the text.' 'Then why are you crying?' asked Chaitanya. The devotee said : 'I see Arjuna's chariot before me. I see Lord Krishna and Arjuna seated in front of it, talking. I see this and I weep.'

" Why does a vijnani keep an attitude of love toward God ? The answer is that 'I-consciousness' persists. It disappears in the state of samadhi, no doubt, but it comes back. In the case of ordinary people the 'I' never disappears. You may cut down the aswattha tree, but the next day sprouts shoot up. (*All laugh.*)

" Even after the attainment of Knowledge this 'I-consciousness' comes up, nobody knows from where. You dream of a tiger. Then you awake ; but your heart keeps on palpitating ! All our suffering is due to this 'I'. The cow cries, 'Hamba!', which means 'I'. That is why it suffers so much. It is yoked to the plough and made to work in rain and sun. Then it may be killed by the butcher. From its hide shoes are made, and also drums, which are mercilessly beaten. (*Laughter.*) Still it does not escape suffering. At last strings are made out of its entrails for the bows used in carding cotton. Then it no longer says, 'Hamba ! Hamba !', 'I ! I !', but 'Tuhu ! Tuhu !', 'Thou ! Thou !' Only then are its troubles over. O Lord, I am the servant ; Thou art the Master. I am the child ; Thou art the Mother.

" Once Rama asked Hanuman, 'How do you look on Me ?' And Hanuman replied : 'O Rama, as long as I have the feeling of "I", I see that Thou art the whole and I am a part ; Thou art the Master and I am Thy servant. But when, O Rama, I have the knowledge of Truth, then I realize that Thou art I, and I am Thou.'

" The relationship of master and servant is the proper one. Since this 'I' must remain, let the rascal be God's servant.

" 'I' and 'mine'—these constitute ignorance. 'My house', 'my wealth', 'my learning', 'my possessions'—the attitude that prompts one to say such things comes of ignorance. On the contrary, the attitude born of Knowledge is : 'O God, Thou art the Master, and all these things belong to Thee. House, family, children, attendants, friends, are Thine.'

" One should constantly remember death. Nothing will survive death. We are born into this world to perform certain duties, like the people who come from the countryside to Calcutta on business. If a visitor goes to a rich man's garden, the superintendent says to him, 'This is our garden', 'This is our lake', and so forth. But if the superintendent is dismissed for some misdeed, he can't carry away even his mango-wood chest. He sends it secretly by the gate-keeper. (*Laughter.*)

"God laughs on two occasions. He laughs when the physician says to the patient's mother, 'Don't be afraid, mother ; I shall certainly cure your boy.' God laughs, saying to Himself, 'I am going to take his life, and this man says he will save it !' The physician thinks he is the master, forgetting that God is the Master. God laughs again when two brothers divide their land with a string, saying to each other, 'This side is mine and that side is yours.' He laughs and says to Himself, 'The whole universe belongs to Me, but they say they own this portion or that portion.'

"Can one know God through reasoning ? Be His servant, surrender yourself to Him, and then pray to Him.

(To Vidyasagar with a smile) "Well, what is your attitude ?"

VIDYASAGAR (smiling) : "Some day I shall confide it to you." (All laugh.)

MASTER (laughing) : "God cannot be realized through mere scholarly reasoning."

Intoxicated with divine love, the Master sang :

Who is there that can understand what Mother Kali is ?

Even the six darsanas are powerless to reveal Her.

It is She, the scriptures say, that is the Inner Self

Of the yogi, who in Self discovers all his joy ;

She that, of Her own sweet will, inhabits every living thing.

The macrocosm and microcosm rest in the Mother's womb :

Now do you see how vast it is ? In the Muladhara

The yogi meditates on Her, and in the Sahasrara :

Who but Siva has beheld Her as She really is ?

Within the lotus wilderness She sports beside Her Mate, the Swan."

When man aspires to understand Her, Ramprasad must smile :

To think of knowing Her, he says, is quite as laughable

As to imagine one can swim across the boundless sea.

But while my mind has understood, alas ! my heart has not ;

Though but a dwarf, it still would strive to make a captive of the moon.

Continuing, the Master said : "Did you notice ?

The macrocosm and microcosm rest in the Mother's womb ;
Now do you see how vast it is ?

"Again, the poet says :

Even the six darsanas are powerless to reveal Her.

She cannot be realized by means of mere scholarship.

"One must have faith and love. Let me tell you how powerful faith is. A man was about to cross the sea from Ceylon to India. Bibhishana said to him : 'Tie this thing in a corner of your wearing-cloth, and you will cross the sea safely. You will be able to walk on the water. But be sure not to examine it, or you will sink.' The man was walking easily on the water of the sea—such is the strength of faith—when, having gone part of the way, he thought, 'What is this wonderful thing Bibhishana has given me, that I

* Siva, the Absolute.

can walk even on the water ?' He untied the knot and found only a leaf with the name of Rama written on it. 'Oh, just this !' he thought, and instantly he sank.

"There is a popular saying that Hanuman jumped over the sea through his faith in Rama's name, but Rama Himself had to build a bridge.

"If a man has faith in God, then he need not be afraid though he may have committed sin—nay, the vilest sin."

Then Sri Ramakrishna sang a song glorifying the power of faith :

If only I can pass away repeating Durga's name,
How canst Thou then, O Blessed One,
Withhold from me deliverance,
Wretched though I may be ? . . .

The Master continued : "Faith and devotion. One realizes God easily through devotion. He is grasped through ecstasy of love."

With these words the Master sang again :

How you are trying, O my mind, to know the nature of God ?
You are groping like a madman locked in a dark room.
He is grasped through ecstatic love ; how can you fathom Him without it ?
Only through affirmation, never negation, can you know Him ;
Neither through Veda nor through Tantra nor the six darsanas.

It is in love's elixir only that He delights, O mind ;
He dwells in the body's inmost depths, in Everlasting Joy.
And, for that love, the mighty yogis practise yoga from age to age ;
When love awakes, the Lord, like a magnet, draws to Him the soul.

He it is, says Ramprasad, that I approach as Mother ;
But must I give away the secret, here in the market-place ?
From the hints I have given, O mind, guess what that Being is !

While singing, the Master went into samadhi. He was seated on the bench, facing west, the palms of his hands joined together, his body erect and motionless. Everyone watched him expectantly. Vidyasagar, too, was speechless and could not take his eyes from the Master.

After a time Sri Ramakrishna showed signs of regaining the normal state. He drew a deep breath and said with a smile : "The means of realizing God are ecstasy of love and devotion—that is, one must love God. He who is Brahman is addressed as the Mother.

• He it is, says Ramprasad, that I approach as Mother ;
• But must I give away the secret, here in the market-place ?
From the hints I have given, O mind, guess what that Being is !

"Ramprasad asks the mind only to guess the nature of God. He wishes it to understand that what is called Brahman in the Vedas is addressed by him as the Mother. He who is attributeless also has attributes. He who is Brahman is also Sakti. When thought of as inactive, He is called Brahman, and

when thought of as the Creator, Preserver, and Destroyer, He is called "the Primordial Energy, Kali."

"Brahman and Sakti are identical, like fire and its power to burn. When we talk of fire we automatically mean also its power to burn. Again, the fire's power to burn implies the fire itself. If you accept the one you must accept the other."

"Brahman alone is addressed as the Mother. This is because a mother is an object of great love. One is able to realize God just through love. Ecstasy of feeling, devotion, love, and faith—these are the means. Listen to a song :

As is a man's meditation, so is his feeling of love ;
 As is a man's feeling of love, so is his gain ;
 And faith is the root of all.
 If in the Nectar Lake of Mother Kali's feet
 My mind remains immersed,
 Of little use are worship, oblations, or sacrifice.

"What is needed is absorption in God—loving Him intensely. The 'Nectar Lake' is the Lake of Immortality. A man sinking in It does not die, but becomes immortal. Some people believe that by thinking of God too much the mind becomes deranged; but that is not true. God is the Lake of Nectar, the Ocean of Immortality. He is called the 'Immortal' in the Vedas. Sinking in It, one does not die, but verily transcends death."

Of little use are worship, oblations, or sacrifice.

If a man comes to love God, he need not trouble himself much about these activities. One needs a fan only as long as there is no breeze. The fan may be laid aside if the southern breeze blows. Then what need is there of a fan?

(To Vidyasagar) "The activities that you are engaged in are good. It is very good if you can perform them in a selfless spirit, renouncing egotism, giving up the idea that you are the doer. Through such action one develops love and devotion to God, and ultimately realizes Him."

"The more you come to love God, the less you will be inclined to perform action. When the daughter-in-law is with child, her mother-in-law gives her less work to do. As time goes by she is given less and less work. When the time of delivery nears, she is not allowed to do any work at all, lest it should hurt the child or cause difficulty at the time of birth."

"By these philanthropic activities you are really doing good to yourself. If you can do them disinterestedly, your mind will become pure and you will develop love of God. As soon as you have that love you will realize Him."

"Man cannot really help the world. God alone does that—He who has created the sun and the moon, who has put love for their children in parents' hearts, endowed noble souls with compassion, and holy men and devotees with divine love. The man who works for others, without any selfish motive, really does good to himself."

"There is gold buried in your heart, but you are not yet aware of it. It is covered with a thin layer of clay. Once you are aware of it, all these activities of yours will lessen. After the birth of her child, the daughter-in-law in the

family busies herself with it alone. Everything she does is only for the child. Her mother-in-law doesn't let her do any household duties.

"Go forward. A wood-cutter once entered a forest to gather wood. A brahmachari said to him, 'Go forward.' He obeyed the injunction and discovered some sandal-wood trees. After a few days he reflected, 'The holy man asked me to go forward. He didn't tell me to stop here.' So he went forward and found a silver-mine. After a few days he went still farther and discovered a gold-mine, and next, mines of diamonds and precious stones. With these he became immensely rich."

"Through selfless work, love of God grows in the heart. Then, through His grace, one realizes Him in course of time. God can be seen. One can talk to Him as I am talking to you."

In silent wonder they all sat listening to the Master's words. It seemed to them that the Goddess of Wisdom Herself, seated on Sri Ramakrishna's tongue, was addressing these words not merely to Vidyasagar, but to all humanity for its good.

It was nearly nine o'clock in the evening. The Master was about to leave.

MASTER (*to Vidyasagar, with a smile*) : "The words I have spoken are really superfluous. You know all this; you simply aren't conscious of it. There are countless gems in the coffers of Varuna. But he himself isn't aware of them."

VIDYASAGAR (*with a smile*) : "You may say as you like."

MASTER (*smiling*) : "Oh, yes. There are many wealthy people who don't know the names of all their servants, and are even unaware of many of the precious things in their houses." (*All laugh.*)

Everybody was delighted with the Master's conversation. Again addressing Vidyasagar, he said with a smile : "Please visit the temple garden some time—I mean the garden of Rasmani. It's a charming place."

VIDYASAGAR : "Oh, of course I shall go. You have so kindly come here to see me, and shall I not return your visit?"

MASTER : "Visit me? Oh, never think of such a thing!"

VIDYASAGAR : "Why, sir? Why do you say that? May I ask you to explain?"

MASTER (*smiling*) : "You see, we are like small fishing-boats. (*All smile.*) We can ply in small canals and shallow waters and also in big rivers. But you are a ship. You may run aground on the way!" (*All laugh.*)

Vidyasagar remained silent. Sri Ramakrishna said with a laugh, "But even a ship can go there at this season."

VIDYASAGAR (*smiling*) : "Yes, this is the monsoon season." (*All laugh.*)

M. said to himself : "This is indeed the monsoon season of newly awakened love. At such times one doesn't care for prestige or formalities."

Sri Ramakrishna then took leave of Vidyasagar, who with his friends escorted the Master to the main gate, leading the way with a lighted candle in his hand. Before leaving the room, the Master prayed for the family's welfare, going into an ecstatic mood as he did so.

As soon as the Master and the devotees reached the gate, they saw an unexpected sight and stood still. In front of them was a bearded gentleman of fair complexion, aged about thirty-six. He wore his clothes like a Bengali, but on his head was a white turban tied after the fashion of the Sikhs. No sooner did he see the Master than he fell prostrate before him, turban and all.

When he stood up the Master said : "Who is this ? Balaram ? Why so late in the evening ?"

BALARAM : "I have been waiting here a long time, sir."

MASTER : "Why didn't you come in ?"

BALARAM : "All were listening to you. I didn't like to disturb you."

The Master got into the carriage with his companions.

VIDYASAGAR (*to M., softly*) : "Shall I pay the carriage hire ?"

M : "Oh, don't bother, please. It is taken care of."

Vidyasagar and his friends bowed to Sri Ramakrishna, and the carriage started for Dakshineswar. But the little group, with the venerable Vidyasagar at their head holding the lighted candle, stood at the gate and gazed after the Master until he was out of sight. *5-3-4*

IV

ADVICE TO HOUSEHOLDERS

August 13, 1882

THE MASTER WAS CONVERSING with Kedar and some other devotees in his room in the temple garden. Kedar was a government official and had spent several years at Dacca, in East Bengal, where he had become a friend of Vijay Goswami. The two would spend a great part of their time together, talking about Sri Ramakrishna and his spiritual experiences. Kedar had once been a member of the Brahmo Samaj. He followed the path of bhakti. Spiritual talk always brought tears to his eyes.

It was five o'clock in the afternoon. Kedar was very happy that day, having arranged a religious festival for Sri Ramakrishna. A singer had been hired by Ram, and the whole day passed in joy.

The Master explained to the devotees the secret of communion with God.

MASTER : "With the realization of Satchidananda one goes into samadhi. Then duties drop away. Suppose I have been talking about the ostad and he arrives. What need is there of talking about him then? How long does the bee buzz around? So long as it isn't sitting on a flower. But it will not do for the sadhaka to renounce duties. He should perform his duties, such as worship, japa, meditation, prayer, and pilgrimage.

"If you see someone engaged in reasoning even after he has realized God, you may liken him to a bee, which also buzzes a little even while sipping honey from a flower."

The Master was highly pleased with the ostad's music. He said to the musician, "There is a special manifestation of God's power in a man who has any outstanding gift, such as proficiency in music."

MUSICIAN : "Sir, what is the way to realize God?"

MASTER : "Bhakti is the one essential thing. To be sure, God exists in all beings. Who, then, is a devotee? He whose mind dwells on God. But this is not possible as long as one has egotism and vanity. The water of God's Grace cannot collect on the high mound of egotism. It runs down. I am a mere machine.

(To Kedar and the other devotees) "God can be realized through all paths. All religions are true. The important thing is to reach the roof. You can reach it by stone stairs or by wooden stairs or by bamboo steps or by a rope. You can also climb up by a bamboo pole.

" You may say that there are many errors and superstitions in another religion. I should reply : Suppose there are. Every religion has errors. Everyone thinks that his watch alone gives the correct time. It is enough to have yearning for God. It is enough to love Him and feel attracted to Him. Don't you know that God is the Inner Guide ? He sees the longing of our heart and the yearning of our soul. Suppose a man has several sons. The older boys address him distinctly as ' Baba ' or ' Papa ', but the babies can at best call him ' Ba ' or ' Pa '. Now, will the father be angry with those who address him in this indistinct way ? The father knows that they too are calling him, only they cannot pronounce his name well. All children are the same to the father. Likewise, the devotees call on God alone, though by different names. They call on one Person only. God is one, but His names are many."

Thursday, August 24, 1882

Sri Ramakrishna was talking to Hazra on the long northeast verandah of his room, when M. arrived. He saluted the Master reverently.

MASTER : " I should like to visit Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar a few times more. The painter first draws the general outlines and then puts in the details and colours at his leisure. The moulder first makes the image out of clay, then plasters it, then gives it a coat of whitewash, and last of all paints it with a brush. All these steps must be taken successively. Vidyasagar is fully ready, but his inner stuff is covered with a thin layer. He is now engaged in doing good works ; but he doesn't know what is within himself. Gold is hidden within him. God dwells within us. If one knows that, one feels like giving up all activities and praying to God with a yearning soul."

So the Master talked with M.—now standing, now pacing up and down the long verandah.

MASTER : " A little spiritual discipline is necessary in order to know what lies within."

M : " Is it necessary to practise discipline all through life ? "

MASTER : " No. But one must be up and doing in the beginning. After that one need not work hard. The helmsman stands up and clutches the rudder firmly as long as the boat is passing through waves, storms, high wind, or around the curves of a river ; but he relaxes after steering through them. As soon as the boat passes the curves and the helmsman feels a favourable wind, he sits comfortably and just touches the rudder. Next he prepares to unfurl the sail and gets ready for a smoke. Likewise, the aspirant enjoys peace and calm after passing the waves and storms of ' woman and gold '.

" Some are born with the characteristics of the yogi ; but they too should be careful. It is ' woman and gold ' alone that is the obstacle ; it makes them deviate from the path of yoga and drags them into worldliness. Perhaps they have some desire for enjoyment. After fulfilling their desire, they again direct their minds to God and thus recover their former state of mind, fit for the practice of yoga.

" Have you ever seen the spring trap for fish, called the ' satka-kal ' ? "

M : " No, sir, I haven't seen it."

MASTER : "They use it in our part of the country. One end of a bamboo pole is fastened in the ground, and the other is bent over with a catch. From this end a line with a hook hangs over the water, with bait tied to the hook. When the fish swallows the bait, suddenly the bamboo jumps up and regains its upright position.

"Again, take a pair of scales, for example. If a weight is placed on one side, the lower needle moves away from the upper one. The lower needle is the mind, and the upper one, God. The meeting of the two is yoga.

"Unless the mind becomes steady there cannot be yoga. It is the wind of worldliness that always disturbs the mind, which may be likened to a candle-flame. If that flame doesn't move at all, then one is said to have attained yoga.

"'Woman and gold' alone is the obstacle to yoga. Always analyse what you see. What is there in the body of a woman? Only such things as blood, flesh, fat, entrails, and the like. Why should one love such a body?

"Sometimes I used to assume a rajasic mood in order to practise renunciation. Once I had the desire to put on a gold-embroidered robe, wear a ring on my finger, and smoke a hubble-bubble with a long pipe. Mathur Babu procured all these things for me. I wore the gold-embroidered robe and said to myself after a while, 'Mind! This is what is called a gold-embroidered robe.' Then I took it off and threw it away. I couldn't stand the robe any more. Again I said to myself, 'Mind! This is called a shawl, and this a ring, and this, smoking a hubble-bubble with a long pipe.' I threw those things away once for all, and the desire to enjoy them never arose in my mind again."

It was almost dusk. The Master and M. stood talking alone near the door on the southeast verandah.

MASTER (to M.) : "The mind of the yogi is always fixed on God, always absorbed in the Self. You can recognize such a man by merely looking at him. His eyes are wide open, with an aimless look, like the eyes of the mother bird hatching her eggs. Her entire mind is fixed on the eggs, and there is a vacant look in her eyes. Can you show me such a picture?"

M : "I shall try to get one."

As evening came on, the temples were lighted up. Sri Ramakrishna was seated on his small couch, meditating on the Divine Mother. Then he chanted the names of God. Incense was burnt in the room, where an oil lamp had been lighted. Sounds of conch-shells and gongs came floating on the air as the evening worship began in the temple of Kali. The light of the moon flooded all the quarters. The Master again spoke to M.

MASTER : "Perform your duties in an unselfish spirit. The work that Vidyasagar is engaged in is very good. Always try to perform your duties without desiring any result."

M : "Yes, sir. But may I know if one can realize God while performing one's duties? Can 'Rama' and 'desire' coexist? The other day I read in a Hindi couplet : 'Where Rama is, there desire cannot be ; where desire is, there Rama cannot be.' "

MASTER : "All, without exception, perform work. Even to chant the name and glories of God is work, as is the meditation of the non-dualist on 'I am'

He'. Breathing is also an activity. There is no way of renouncing work altogether. So do your work, but surrender the result to God."

M : "Sir, may I make an effort to earn more money ? "

MASTER : "It is permissible to do so to maintain a religious family. You may try to increase your income, but in an honest way. The goal of life is not the earning of money, but the service of God. Money is not harmful if it is devoted to the service of God."

M : "How long should a man feel obliged to do his duty toward his wife and children ? "

MASTER : "As long as they feel pinched for food and clothing. But one need not take the responsibility of a son when he is able to support himself. When the young' fledgling learns to pick its own food, its mother pecks it if it comes to her for food."

M : "How long must one do one's duty ? "

MASTER : "The blossom drops off when the fruit appears. One doesn't have to do one's duty after the attainment of God, nor does one feel like doing it then.

If a drunkard takes too much liquor he cannot retain consciousness. If he takes only two or three glasses, he can go on with his work. As you advance nearer and nearer to God, He will reduce your activities little by little. Have no fear.

"Finish the few duties you have at hand, and then you will have peace. When the mistress of the house goes to bathe after finishing her cooking and other household duties, she won't come back, however you may shout after her."

M : "Sir, what is the meaning of the realization of God ? What do you mean by God-vision ? How does one attain it ? "

MASTER : "According to the Vaishnavas the aspirants and the seers of God may be divided into different groups. These are the prayartaka, the sadhaka, the siddha, and the siddha of the siddha. He who has just set foot on the path may be called a prayartaka. He may be called a sadhaka who has for some time been practising spiritual disciplines, such as worship, japa, meditation, and the chanting of God's name and glories. He may be called a siddha who has known from his inner experience that God exists. An analogy is given in the Vedanta to explain this. The master of the house is asleep in a dark room. Someone is groping in the darkness to find him. He touches the couch and says, 'No, it is not he.' He touches the window and says, 'No, it is not he.' He touches the door and says, 'No, it is not he.' This is known in the Vedanta as the process of 'Neti, neti'; 'Not this, not this'. At last his hand touches the master's body and he exclaims, 'Here he is !' In other words, he is now conscious of the 'existence' of the master. He has found him, but he doesn't yet know him intimately.

"There is another type, known as the siddha of the siddha, the 'supremely perfect'. It is quite a different thing when one talks to the master intimately, when one knows God very intimately through love and devotion. A siddha has undoubtedly attained God, but the 'supremely perfect' has known God very intimately.

• "But in order to realize God, one must assume one of these attitudes : santa, dasya, sakhya, vatsalya, or madhur."

"Santa, the serene attitude. The rishis of olden times had this attitude toward God. They did not desire any worldly enjoyment. It is like the single-minded devotion of a wife to her husband. She knows that her husband is the embodiment of beauty and love, a veritable Madan."

"Dasya, the attitude of a servant toward his master. Hanuman had this attitude toward Rama. He felt the strength of a lion when he worked for Rama. A wife feels this mood also. She serves her husband with all her heart and soul. A mother also has a little of this attitude, as Yasoda had toward Krishna."

"Sakhya, the attitude of friendship. Friends say to one another, 'Come here and sit near me.' Sridama and other friends sometimes fed Krishna with fruit, part of which they had already eaten, and sometimes climbed on His shoulders."

"Vatsalya, the attitude of a mother toward her child. This was Yasoda's attitude toward Krishna. The wife, too, has a little of this. She feeds her husband with her very life-blood, as it were. The mother feels happy only when the child has eaten to his heart's content. Yasoda would roam about with butter in her hand, in order to feed Krishna."

"Madhur, the attitude of a woman toward her paramour. Radha had this attitude toward Krishna. The wife also feels it for her husband. This attitude includes all the other four."

M : "When one sees God does one see Him with these eyes ?"

MASTER : "God cannot be seen with these physical eyes. In the course of spiritual discipline one gets a 'love body', endowed with 'love eyes', 'love ears', and so on. One sees God with those 'love eyes'. One hears the voice of God with those 'love ears'. One even gets a sexual organ made of love."

At these words M. burst out laughing. The Master continued, unannoyed, "With this 'love body' the soul communes with God."

M. again became serious.

MASTER : "But this is not possible without intense love of God. One sees nothing but God everywhere when one loves Him with great intensity. It is like a person with jaundice, who sees everything yellow. Then one feels, 'I am verily He.'

"A drunkard, deeply intoxicated, says, 'Verily I am Kali !' The gopis, intoxicated with love, exclaimed, 'Verily I am Krishna !'

"One who thinks of God, day and night, beholds Him everywhere. It is like a man's seeing flames on all sides after he has gazed fixedly at one flame for some time."

"But that isn't the real flame", flashed through M.'s mind.

Sri Ramakrishna, who could read a man's inmost thought, said : "One doesn't lose consciousness by thinking of Him who is all Spirit, all Consciousness. Shivanath once remarked that too much thinking about God

confounds the brain. Thereupon I said to him, 'How can one become unconscious by thinking of Consciousness?'

M : "Yes, sir, I realize that. It isn't like thinking of an unreal object. How can a man lose his intelligence if he always fixes his mind on Him whose very nature is eternal Intelligence?"

MASTER (*with pleasure*) : "It is through God's grace that you understand that. The doubts of the mind will not disappear without His grace. Doubts do not disappear without Self-realization."

"But one need not fear anything if one has received the grace of God. It is rather easy for a child to stumble if he holds his father's hand; but there can be no such fear if the father holds the child's hand. A man does not have to suffer any more if God, in His grace, removes his doubts and reveals Himself to him. But this grace descends upon him only after he has prayed to God with intense yearning of heart and practised spiritual discipline. The mother feels compassion for her child when she sees him running about breathlessly. She has been hiding herself; now she appears before the child."

"But why should God make us run about?" thought M.

Immediately Sri Ramakrishna said : "It is His will that we should run about a little. Then it is great fun. God has created the world in play, as it were. This is called Mahamaya, the Great Illusion. Therefore one must take refuge in the Divine Mother, the Cosmic Power Itself. It is She who has bound us with the shackles of illusion. The realization of God is possible only when those shackles are severed."

The Master continued : "One must propitiate the Divine Mother, the Primal Energy, in order to obtain God's grace. God Himself is Mahamaya, who deludes the world with Her illusion and conjures up the magic of creation, preservation, and destruction. She has spread this veil of ignorance before our eyes. We can go into the inner chamber only when She lets us pass through the door. Living outside, we see only outer objects, but not that Eternal Being, Existence-Knowledge-Bliss Absolute. Therefore it is stated in the Purana that deities like Brahma praised Mahamaya for the destruction of the demons Madhu and Kaitabha."

"Sakti alone is the root of the universe. That Primal Energy has two aspects : *vidya* and *avidya*. *Avidya* deludes. *Avidya* conjures up 'woman and gold', which casts the spell. *Vidya* begets devotion, kindness, wisdom, and love, which lead one to God. This *avidya* must be propitiated, and that is the purpose of the rites of Sakti worship."¹

"The devotee assumes various attitudes toward Sakti in order to propitiate Her : the attitude of a handmaid, a 'hero', or a child. A hero's attitude is to please Her even as a man pleases a woman through intercourse."

"The worship of Sakti is extremely difficult. It is no joke. I passed two years as the handmaid and companion of the Divine Mother. But my natural attitude has always been that of a child toward its mother. I regard the breasts of any woman as those of my own mother."

¹ In this worship a woman is regarded as the representation of the Divine Mother.

• "Women are, all of them, the veritable images of Sakti. In northwest India the bride holds a knife in her hand at the time of marriage ; in Bengal, a nut-cutter. The meaning is that the bridegroom, with the help of the bride, who is the embodiment of the Divine Power, will sever the bondage of illusion. This is the 'heroic' attitude. I never worshipped the Divine Mother that way. My attitude toward Her is that of a child toward its mother.

"The bride is the very embodiment of Sakti. Haven't you noticed, at the marriage ceremony, how the groom sits behind like an idiot ? But the bride—she is so bold !

"After attaining God one forgets His external splendour, the glories of His creation. One doesn't think of God's glories after one has seen Him. The devotee, once immersed in God's Bliss, doesn't calculate any more about outer things. When I see Narendra, I don't need to ask him : 'What's your name ? Where do you live ?' Where is the time for such questions ? Once a man asked Hanuman which day of the fortnight it was. 'Brother,' said Hanuman, 'I don't know anything of the day of the week, or the fortnight, or the position of the stars. I think of Rama alone.'"

October 16, 1882

It was Monday, a few days before the Durga Puja, the festival of the Divine Mother. Sri Ramakrishna was in a very happy state of mind, for Narendra was with him. Narendra had brought two or three young members of the Brahmo Samaj to the temple garden. Besides these, Rakhal, Ramlal, Hazra, and M. were with the Master.

Narendra had his midday meal with Sri Ramakrishna. Afterwards a temporary bed was made on the floor of the Master's room so that the disciples might rest awhile. A mat was spread, over which was placed a quilt covered with a white sheet. A few cushions and pillows completed the simple bed. Like a child, the Master sat near Narendranath on the bed. He talked with the devotees in great delight. With a radiant smile lighting his face, and his eyes fixed on Narendra, he was giving them various spiritual teachings, interspersing these with incidents from his own life.

MASTER : "After I had experienced samadhi, my mind craved intensely to hear only about God. I would always search for places where they were reciting or explaining the sacred books, such as the *Bhagavata*, the *Mahabharata*, and the *Adhyatma Ramayana*. I used to go to Krishnakishore to hear him read the *Adhyatma Ramayana*.

"What tremendous faith Krishnakishore had ! Once, while at Vrindavan, he felt thirsty and went to a well. Near it he saw a man standing. On being asked to draw a little water for him, the man said : 'I belong to a low caste, sir. You are a brahmin. How can I draw water for you ?' Krishnakishore said : 'Take the name of Siva. By repeating His holy name you will make yourself pure.' The low-caste man did as he was told, and Krishnakishore, orthodox brahmin that he was, drank that water. What tremendous faith !

"Once a holy man came to the bank of the Ganges and lived near the bathing-ghat at Ariadaha, not far from Dakshineswar. We thought of paying

him a visit. I said to Haladhari : ' Krishnakishore and I are going to see a holy man. Will you come with us ?' Haladhari replied, ' What is the use of seeing a mere human body, which is no better than a cage of clay ?' Haladhari was a student of the *Gita* and *Vedanta* philosophy, and therefore referred to the holy man as a mere 'cage of clay'. I repeated this to Krishnakishore. With great anger he said : ' How impudent of Haladhari to make such a remark ! How can he ridicule as a "cage of clay" the body of a man who constantly thinks of God, who meditates on Rama, and has renounced all for the sake of the Lord ? Doesn't he know that such a man is the embodiment of Spirit ?' He was so upset by Haladhari's remarks that he would turn his face away from him whenever he met him in the temple garden, and stopped speaking to him.

"Once Krishnakishore asked me, ' Why have you cast off the sacred thread ?' In those days of God-vision I felt as if I were passing through the great storm of Aswin,² and everything had blown away from me. No trace of my old self was left. I lost all consciousness of the world. I could hardly keep my cloth on my body, not to speak of the sacred thread ! I said to Krishnakishore, ' Ah, you will understand if you ever happen to be as intoxicated with God as I was.'

"And it actually came to pass. He too passed through a God-intoxicated state, when he would repeat only the word ' Om ' and shut himself up alone in his room. His relatives thought he was actually mad, and called in a physician. Ram Kaviraj of Natagore came to see him. Krishnakishore said to the physician, ' Cure me, sir, of my malady, if you please, but not of my Om.' (*All laugh.*)

"One day I went to see him and found him in a pensive mood. When I asked him about it, he said : ' The tax-collector was here. He threatened to dispose of my brass pots, my cups, and my few utensils, if I didn't pay the tax ; so I am worried.' I said : ' But why should you worry about it ? Let him take away your pots and pans. Let him arrest your body even. How will that affect you ? For your nature is that of Kha !' (*Narendra and the others laugh.*) He used to say to me that he was the Spirit, all-pervading as the sky. He had got that idea from the *Adhyatma Ramayana*. I used to tease him now and then, addressing him as ' Kha '. Therefore I said to him that day, with a smile : ' You are Kha. Taxes cannot move you !'

"In that state of God-intoxication I used to speak out my mind to all. I was no respecter of persons. Even to men of position I was not afraid to speak the truth.

"One day Jatindra³ came to the garden of Jadu Mallick. I was there too. I asked him : ' What is the duty of man ? Isn't it our duty to think of God ?' Jatindra replied : ' We are worldly people. How is it possible for us to achieve liberation ? Even King Yudhisthira had to have a vision of hell.' This made me very angry. I said to him : ' What sort of man are you ? Of all the incidents of Yudhisthira's life, you remember only his seeing hell. You don't remember his truthfulness, his forbearance, his patience, his discrimination, his dispassion, his devotion to God.' I was about to say many more things, when

² The Master referred to the great cyclone of 1864.

³ A titled aristocrat of Calcutta.

Hriday stopped my mouth. After a little while Jatindra left the place, saying he had some other business to attend to.

"Many days later I went with Captain to see Raja¹ Sourindra Tagore. As soon as I met him, I said, 'I can't address you as "Raja", or by any such title, for I should be telling a lie.' He talked to me a few minutes, but even so our conversation was interrupted by the frequent visits of Europeans and others. A man of rajasic temperament, Sourindra was naturally busy with many things. Jatindra, his eldest brother, had been told of my coming, but he sent word that he had a pain in his throat and couldn't go out.

"One day, in that state of divine intoxication, I went to the bathing-ghat on the Ganges at Baranagore. There I saw Jaya Mukherji repeating the name of God; but his mind was on something else. I went up and slapped him twice on the cheeks.

"At one time Rani Rasmani was staying in the temple garden. She came to the shrine of the Divine Mother, as she frequently did when I worshipped Kali, and asked me to sing a song or two. On this occasion, while I was singing, I noticed she was sorting the flowers for worship absent-mindedly. At once I slapped her on the cheeks. She became quite embarrassed and sat there with folded hands.

"Alarmed at this state of mind myself, I said to my cousin Haladhar: 'Just see my nature! How can I get rid of it?' After praying to the Divine Mother for some time with great yearning, I was able to shake off this habit.

"When one gets into such a state of mind, one doesn't enjoy any conversation but that about God. I used to weep when I heard people talk about worldly matters. When I accompanied Mathur Babu on a pilgrimage, we spent a few days in Benares at Raja Babu's house. One day I was seated in the drawing-room with Mathur Babu, Raja Babu, and others. Hearing them talk about various worldly things, such as their business losses and so forth, I wept bitterly and said to the Divine Mother: 'Mother, where have You brought me? I was much better off in the temple garden at Dakshineswar. Here I am in a place where I must hear about "woman and gold". But at Dakshineswar I could avoid it.'"

The Master asked the devotees, especially Narendra, to rest awhile, and he himself lay down on the smaller couch.

Late in the afternoon Narendra sang. Rakhal, Latu, M., Hazra, and Priya, Narendra's Brahmo friend, were present. The singing was accompanied by the drum:

Meditate, O my mind, on the Lord Hari,
The Stainless One, Pure Spirit through and through.
How peerless is the light that in Him shines!
How soul-bewitching is His wondrous form!
How dear is He to all His devotees! . . .

¹A title conferred on Sourindra by the Government of India. The word "raja" really means "ruler of a kingdom".

²A young disciple of the Master, who later became a monk under the name of Swami Adbhutananda.

After this song Narendra sang :

Oh, when will dawn for me that day of blessedness
When He who is all Good, all Beauty, and all Truth,
Will light the inmost shrine of my heart ?
When shall I sink at last, ever beholding Him,
Into that Ocean of Delight ?
Lord, as Infinite Wisdom Thou shalt enter my soul,
And my unquiet mind, made speechless by Thy sight,
Will find a haven at Thy feet.
In my heart's firmament, O Lord, Thou wilt arise
As Blissful Immortality ;
And as, when the chakora beholds the rising moon,
It sports about for very joy,
So, too, shall I be filled with heavenly happiness
When Thou appearest unto me.

Thou One without a Second, all Peace, the King of Kings !
At Thy beloved feet I shall renounce my life
And so at last shall gain life's goal :
I shall enjoy the bliss of heaven while yet on earth !
Where else is a boon so rare bestowed ?
Then shall I see Thy glory, pure and untouched by stain ;
As darkness flees from light, so will my darkest sins
Desert me at Thy dawn's approach.
Kindle in me, O Lord, the blazing fire of faith
To be the pole-star of my life;
O Succour of the weak, fulfil my one desire !
Then shall I bathe both day and night
In the boundless bliss of Thy Love, and utterly forget
Myself, O Lord, attaining Thee.

Narendra sang again :

With beaming face chant the sweet name of God
Till in your heart the nectar overflows.
Drink of it ceaselessly and share it with all !
If ever your heart runs dry, parched by the flames
Of worldly desire, chant the sweet name of God,
And heavenly love will moisten your arid soul.

Be sure, O mind, you never forget to chant
His holy name : when danger stares in your face,
Call on Him, your Father Compassionate ;
With His name's thunder, snap the fetters of sin !
Come, let us fulfil our hearts' desires
By drinking deep of Everlasting Joy,
Made one with Him in Love's pure ecstasy.

Now Narendra and the devotees began to sing kirtan, accompanied by the drum and cymbals. They moved round and round the Master as they sang :

Immerse yourself for evermore, O mind,
In Him who is Pure Knowledge and Pure Bliss.



SRI SARADA DEVI, AFTERWARDS KNOWN AS THE HOLY MOTHER

• Next they sang :

Oh, when will dawn for me that day of blessedness
 When He who is all Good, all Beauty, and all Truth
 Will light the inmost shrine of my heart ? . . .

At last Narendra himself was playing on the drums, and he sang with the Master, full of joy :

With beaming face chant the sweet name of God . . .

When the music was over, Sri Ramakrishna held Narendra in his arms a long time and said, " You have made us so happy today ! " The flood-gate of the Master's heart was open so wide, that night, that he could hardly contain himself for joy. It was eight o'clock in the evening. Intoxicated with divine love, he paced the long verandah north of his room. Now and then he could be heard talking to the Divine Mother. Suddenly he said in an excited voice, " What can you do to me ? " Was the Master hinting that maya was helpless before him, since he had the Divine Mother for his support ?

Narendra, M., and Priya were going to spend the night at the temple garden. This pleased the Master highly, especially since Narendra would be with him. The Holy Mother,¹ who was living in the nahabat, had prepared the supper. Surendra² bore the greater part of the Master's expenses. The meal was ready, and the plates were set out on the southeast verandah of the Master's room.

Near the east door of this room Narendra and the other devotees were gossiping.

NARENDRA : " How do you find the young men nowadays ? "

M : " They are not bad ; but they don't receive any religious instruction."

NARENDRA : " But from my experience I feel they are going to the dogs. They smoke cigarettes, indulge in frivolous talk, enjoy foppishness, play truant, and do everything of that sort. I have even seen them visiting questionable places."

M : " I didn't notice such things during our student days."

NARENDRA : " Perhaps you didn't mix with the students intimately. I have even seen them talking with people of immoral character. Perhaps they are on terms of intimacy with them."

M : " It is strange indeed."

NARENDRA : " I know that many of them form bad habits. It would be proper if the guardians of the boys, and the authorities, kept their eyes on these matters."

They were talking thus when Sri Ramakrishna came to them and asked with a smile, " Well, what are you talking about ? "

NARENDRA : " I have been asking M. about the boys in the schools. The conduct of students nowadays isn't all that it should be."

¹ By this name Sri Ramakrishna's wife was known among his devotees.

² The name by which Sri Ramakrishna addressed Suresh Mitra, a beloved householder disciple.

The Master became grave and said to M. rather seriously : " This kind of conversation is not good. It isn't desirable to indulge in any talk but talk of God. You are their senior, and you are intelligent. You should not have encouraged them to talk about such matters."

Narendra was then about nineteen years old, and M. about twenty-eight. Thus admonished, M. felt embarrassed, and the others also fell silent.

While the devotees were enjoying their meal, Sri Ramakrishna stood by and watched them with intense delight. That night the Master's joy was very great.

After supper the devotees rested on the mat spread on the floor of the Master's room. They began to talk with him. It was indeed a mirth of joy. The Master asked Narendra to sing the song beginning with the line : " In Wisdom's firmament the moon of Love is rising full."

Narendra sang, and other devotees played the drums and cymbals :

In Wisdom's firmament, the moon of Love is rising full,
And Love's flood-tide, in surging waves, is flowing everywhere.
O Lord, how full of bliss Thou art ! Victory unto Thee !

On every side shine devotees, like stars around the moon ;
Their Friend, the Lord All-merciful, joyously, plays with them.
Behold ! the gates of paradise today are open wide.

The soft spring wind of the New Day raises fresh waves of joy ;
Gently it carries to the earth the fragrance of God's Love,
Till all the yogis, drunk with bliss, are lost in ecstasy.

Upon the sea of the world unfolds the lotus of the New Day,
And there the Mother sits enshrined in blissful majesty.
See how the bees are mad with joy, sipping the nectar there !

• Behold the Mother's radiant face, which so enchanteth the heart
And captivateth the universe ! About Her Lotus Feet
Bands of ecstatic holy men are dancing in delight.

What matchless loveliness is Hers ! What infinite content
Pervadeth the heart when She appears ! O brothers, says Premdas,
I humbly beg you, one and all, to sing the Mother's praise !

Sri Ramakrishna sang and danced, and the devotees danced around him.

When the song was over, the Master walked up and down the northeast verandah, where Hazra was seated with M. The Master sat down there. He asked a devotee, " Do you ever have dreams ? "

DEVOTEE : " Yes, sir. The other day I dreamt a strange dream. I saw the whole world enveloped in water. There was water on all sides. A few boats were visible, but suddenly huge waves appeared and sank them. I was about to board a ship with a few others, when we saw a brahmin walking over that expanse of water. I asked him, ' How can you walk over the deep ? ' The brahmin said with a smile : ' Oh, there is no difficulty about that. There is a

bridge under the water.' I said to him, 'Where are you going?' 'To Bhawani-pur, the city of the Divine Mother', he replied. 'Wait a little', I cried. 'I shall accompany you.'"

MASTER : "Oh, I am thrilled to hear the story!"

DEVOTEE : "The brahmin said : 'I am in a hurry. It will take you some time to get out of the boat. Good-bye. Remember this path and come after me.'"

MASTER : "Oh, my hair is standing on end! Please be initiated by a guru as soon as possible."

Shortly before midnight Narendra and the other devotees lay down on a bed made on the floor of the Master's room.

At dawn some of the devotees were up. They saw the Master, naked as a child, pacing up and down the room, repeating the names of the various gods and goddesses. His voice was sweet as nectar. Now he would look at the Ganges, now stop in front of the pictures hanging on the wall and bow down before them, chanting all the while the holy names in his sweet voice. He chanted : "Veda, Purana, Tantra; Gita, Gayatri; Bhagavata, Bhakta, Bhagavan." Referring to the *Gita*, he repeated many times, "Tagi, tagi, tagi." Now and then he would say : "O Mother. Thou art verily Brahman, and Thou art verily Sakti. Thou art Purusha and Thou art Prakriti. Thou art Virat. Thou art the Absolute, and Thou dost manifest Thyself as the Relative. Thou art verily the twenty-four cosmic principles."

In the mean time the morning service had begun in the temples of Kali and Radhakanta. Sounds of conch-shells and cymbals were carried on the air. The devotees came outside the room and saw the priests and servants gathering flowers in the garden for the divine service in the temples. From the nahabat floated the sweet melody of musical instruments, befitting the morning hours.

Narendra and other devotees finished their morning duties and came to the Master. With a sweet smile on his lips Sri Ramakrishna was standing on the northeast verandah, close to his own room.

NARENDRA : "We noticed several sannyasis belonging to the sect of Nanak in the Panchavati."

MASTER : "Yes, they arrived here yesterday. (*To Narendra*) I'd like to see you all sitting together on the mat."

As they sat there the Master looked at them with evident delight. He then began to talk with them. Narendra asked about spiritual discipline.

MASTER : "Bhakti, love of God, is the essence of all spiritual discipline. Through love one acquires renunciation and discrimination naturally."

NARENDRA : "Isn't it true that the Tantra prescribes spiritual discipline in the company of woman?"

MASTER : "That is not desirable. It is a very difficult path and often causes the aspirant's downfall. There are three such kinds of discipline. One may regard woman⁸ as one's mistress or look on oneself as her handmaid or as

⁸ This word is formed by reversing the letters of "Gita". "Tagi" means "one who has renounced". Renunciation is the import of this sacred book. —

⁹ Woman is the symbol of the Divine Mother.

her child. I look on woman as my mother. To look on oneself as her handmaid is also good ; but it is extremely difficult to practise spiritual discipline looking on woman as one's mistress. To regard oneself as her child is a very pure attitude."

The sannyasi belonging to the sect of Nanak entered the room and greeted the Master, saying, " Namo Narayanaya."¹⁰ Sri Ramakrishna asked them to sit down.

MASTER : " Nothing is impossible for God. Nobody can describe His nature in words. Everything is possible for Him. There lived at a certain place two yogis who were practising spiritual discipline. The sage Narada was passing that way one day. Realizing who he was, one of the yogis said : ' You have just come from God Himself. What is He doing now ? ' Narada replied, ' Why, I saw Him making camels and elephants pass and repass through the eye of a needle.' At this the yogi said : ' Is that anything to wonder at ? Everything is possible for God.' But the other yogi said : ' What ? Making elephants pass through the eye of a needle—is that ever possible ? You have never been to the Lord's dwelling-place.' "

At nine o'clock in the morning, while the Master was still sitting in his room, Manomohan arrived from Konnagar with some members of his family. In answer to Sri Ramakrishna's kind inquiries, Manomohan explained that he was taking them to Calcutta. The Master said : " Today is the first day of the Bengali month, an inauspicious day for undertaking a journey. I hope everything will be well with you." With a smile he began to talk of other matters.

When Narendra and his friends had finished bathing in the Ganges, the Master said to them earnestly : " Go to the Panchavati and meditate there under the banyan-tree. Shall I give you something to sit on ? "

About half past ten Narendra and his Brahmo friends were meditating in the Panchavati. After a while Sri Ramakrishna came to them. M., too, was present.

The Master said to the Brahmo devotees : " In meditation one must be absorbed in God. By merely floating on the surface of the water, can you reach the gems lying at the bottom of the sea ? "

Then he sang :

Taking the name of Kali, dive deep down, O mind,
Into the heart's fathomless depths,
Where many a precious gem lies hid.
But never believe the bed of the ocean bare of gems
If in the first few dives you fail ;
With firm resolve and self-control
Dive deep and make your way to Mother Kali's realm.

Down in the ocean depths of heavenly Wisdom lie
The wondrous pearls of Peace, O mind ;
And you yourself can gather them,
If you but have pure love and follow the scriptures' rule.

¹⁰ " Salutations to God." This is the way sadhus greet one another.

Within those ocean depths, as well,
 Six alligators¹¹ lurk—lust, anger, and the rest—
 Swimming about in search of prey.
 Smear yourself with the turmeric of discrimination :
 The very smell of it will shield you from their jaws.
 Upon the ocean bed lie strewn
 Unnumbered pearls and precious gems ;
 Plunge in, says Ramprasad, and gather up handfuls there !

Narendra and his friends came down from their seats on the raised platform of the Panchavati and stood near the Master. He returned to his room with them. The Master continued : "When you plunge in the water of the ocean, you may be attacked by alligators. But they won't touch you if your body is smeared with turmeric. There are no doubt six alligators—lust, anger, avarice, and so on—with in the 'heart's fathomless depths'. But protect yourself with the turmeric of discrimination and renunciation, and they won't touch you.

"What can you achieve by mere lecturing and scholarship without discrimination and dispassion ? God alone is real, and all else is unreal. God alone is substance, and all else is nonentity. That is discrimination.

"First of all set up God in the shrine of your heart, and then deliver lectures as much as you like. How will the mere repetition of 'Brahma' profit you if you are not imbued with discrimination and dispassion ? It is the empty sound of a conch-shell.

"There lived in a village a young man named Padmalochan. People used to call him 'Podo', for short. In this village there was a temple in a very dilapidated condition. It contained no image of God. Aswattha and other plants sprang up on the ruins of its walls. Bats lived inside, and the floor was covered with dust and the droppings of the bats. The people of the village had stopped visiting the temple. One day after dusk the villagers heard the sound of a conch-shell from the direction of the temple. They thought perhaps someone had installed an image in the shrine and was performing the evening worship. One of them softly opened the door and saw Padmalochan standing in a corner, blowing the conch. No image had been set up. The temple hadn't been swept or washed. And filth and dirt lay everywhere. Then he shouted to Podo :

You have set up no image here,
 Within the shrine, O fool !
 Blowing the conch, you simply make
 Confusion worse confounded.
 Day and night eleven bats
 Scream there incessantly. . . .

"There is no use in merely making a noise if you want to establish the Deity in the shrine of your heart, if you want to realize God. First of all purify the mind. In the pure heart God takes His seat. One cannot bring the holy

¹¹ The six passions : lust, anger, avarice, delusion, pride, and envy.

image into the temple if the droppings of bats are all around. The eleven bats are our eleven organs : five of action, five of perception, and the mind.

"First of all invoke the Deity, and then give lectures to your heart's content. First of all dive deep. Plunge to the bottom and gather up the gems. Then you may do other things. But nobody wants to plunge. People are without spiritual discipline and prayer, without renunciation and dispassion. They learn a few words and immediately start to deliver lectures. It is difficult to teach others. Only if a man gets a command from God, after realizing Him, is he entitled to teach."

Thus conversing, the Master came to the west end of the verandah. M. stood by his side. Sri Ramakrishna had repeated again and again that God cannot be realized without discrimination and renunciation. This made M. extremely worried. He had married and was then a young man of twenty-eight, educated in college in the Western way. Having a sense of duty, he asked himself, "Do discrimination and dispassion mean giving up 'woman and gold'?" He was really at a loss to know what to do.

M. (*to the Master*) : "What should one do if one's wife says : 'You are neglecting me. I shall commit suicide' ?"

MASTER (*in a serious tone*) : "Give up such a wife if she proves an obstacle in the way of spiritual life. Let her commit suicide or anything else she likes. The wife that hampers her husband's spiritual life is an ungodly wife."

Immersed in deep thought, M. stood leaning against the wall. Narendra and the other devotees remained silent a few minutes. The Master exchanged several words with them ; then, suddenly going to M., he whispered in his ear : "But if a man has sincere love for God, then all come under his control—the king, wicked persons, and his wife. Sincere love of God on the husband's part may eventually help the wife to lead a spiritual life. If the husband is good, then through the grace of God the wife may also follow his example."

This had a most soothing effect on M.'s worried mind. All the while he had been thinking : "Let her commit suicide. What can I do ?"

M. (*to the Master*) : "This world is a terrible place indeed."

MASTER (*to the Devotees*) : "That is the reason Chaitanya said to his companion Nityananda, 'Listen, brother, there is no hope of salvation for the worldly-minded.'"

On another occasion the Master had said to M. privately : "Yes, there is no hope for a worldly man if he is not sincerely devoted to God. But he has nothing to fear if he remains in the world after realizing God. Nor need a man have any fear whatever of the world if he attains sincere devotion by practising spiritual discipline now and then in solitude. Chaitanya had several householders among his devotees, but they were householders in name only, for they lived unattached to the world."

It was noon. The worship was over, and food offerings had been made in the temple. The doors of the temple were shut. Sri Ramakrishna sat down for his meal, and Narendra and the other devotees partook of the food offerings from the temple.

Sunday, October 22, 1882

It was the day of Vijaya, the last day of the celebration of the worship of Durga, when the clay image is immersed in the water of a lake or river.

About nine o'clock in the morning M. was seated on the floor of the Master's room at Dakshineswar, near Sri Ramakrishna, who was reclining on the small couch. Rakhal was then living with the Master, and Narendra and Bhavanath visited him frequently. Baburam had seen him only once or twice.

MASTER : "Did you have any holiday during the Durga Puja ?"

M : "Yes, sir. I went to Keshab's house every day for the first three days of the worship."

MASTER : "Is that so ?"

M : "I heard there a very interesting interpretation of the Durga Puja."

MASTER : "Please tell me all about it."

M : "Keshab Sen held daily morning prayers in his house, lasting till ten or eleven. During these prayers he gave the inner meaning of the Durga Puja. He said that if anyone could realize the Divine Mother, that is to say, could install Mother Durga in the shrine of his heart, then Lakshmi, Sarasvati, Kartika, and Ganesa¹⁷ would come there of themselves. Lakshmi means wealth, Sarasvati knowledge, Kartika strength, and Ganesa success. By realizing the Divine Mother within one's heart, one gets all these without any effort whatever."

Sri Ramakrishna listened to the description, questioning M. now and then about the prayers conducted by Keshab. At last he said to M. : "Don't go hither and thither. Come here alone. Those who belong to the inner circle of my devotees will come only here. Boys like Narendra, Bhavanath, and Rakhal are my very intimate disciples. They are not to be thought lightly of. Feed¹⁸ them one day. What do you think of Narendra ?"

M : "I think very highly of him, sir."

MASTER : "Haven't you observed his many virtues ? He is not only well-versed in music, vocal and instrumental, but he is also very learned. Besides, he has controlled his passions and declares he will lead a celibate life. He has been devoted to God since his very boyhood."

"How are you getting along with your meditation nowadays ? What aspect of God appeals to your mind—with form or without form ?"

M : "Sir, now I can't fix my mind on God with form. On the other hand, I can't concentrate steadily on God without form."

MASTER : "Now you see that the mind cannot be fixed, all of a sudden, on the formless aspect of God. It is wise to think of God with form during the primary stages."

M : "Do you mean to suggest that one should meditate on clay images ?"

MASTER : "Why clay ? These images are the embodiments of Consciousness."

¹⁷ According to Hindu mythology, Lakshmi and Sarasvati are the daughters, and Kartika and Ganesa the sons, of Durga. Associated with the image of Durga, they occupy positions on both sides of the Divine Mother.

¹⁸ Feeding a holy man is considered a meritorious act.

M : "Even so, one must think of hands, feet, and the other parts of the body. But again, I realize that the mind cannot be concentrated unless one meditates, in the beginning, on God with form. You have told me so. Well, God can easily assume different forms. May one meditate on the form of one's own mother?"

MASTER : "Yes, the mother should be adored. She is indeed an embodiment of Brahman."

M. sat in silence. After a few minutes he asked the Master : "What does one feel while thinking of God without form? Isn't it possible to describe it?" After some reflection, the Master said, "Do you know what it is like?" He remained silent a moment and then said a few words to M. about one's experiences at the time of the vision of God with and without form.

MASTER : "You see, one must practise spiritual discipline to understand this correctly. Suppose there are treasures in a room. If you want to see them and lay hold of them, you must take the trouble to get the key and unlock the door. After that you must take the treasures out. But suppose the room is locked, and standing outside the door you say to yourself : 'Here I have opened the door. Now I have broken the lock of the chest. Now I have taken out the treasure.' Such brooding near the door will not enable you to achieve anything."

"You must practise discipline."

The jnanis think of God without form. They don't accept the Divine Incarnation. Praising Sri Krishna, Arjuna said, 'Thou art Brahman Absolute.' Sri Krishna replied, 'Follow Me, and you will know whether or not I am Brahman Absolute.' So saying, Sri Krishna led Arjuna to a certain place and asked him what he saw there. 'I see a huge tree,' said Arjuna, 'and on it I notice fruits hanging like clusters of blackberries.' Then Krishna said to Arjuna, 'Come nearer and you will find that these are not clusters of black-berries, but clusters of innumerable Krishnas like Me, hanging from the tree.' In other words, Divine Incarnations without number appear and disappear on the tree of the Absolute Brahman.

"Kabirdas was strongly inclined to the formless God. At the mention of Krishna's name he would say : 'Why should I worship Him? The gopis would clap their hands while He performed a monkey dance.' (With a smile) But I accept God with form when I am in the company of people who believe in that ideal, and I also agree with those who believe in the formless God."

M. (smiling) : "You are as infinite as He of whom we have been talking. Truly, no one can fathom your depth."

MASTER (smiling) : "Ah! I see you have found it out. Let me tell you one thing. One should follow various paths. One should practise each creed for a time. In a game of satrancha a piece can't reach the centre square until it completes the circle; but once in the square it can't be overtaken by any other piece."

M : "That is true, sir."

MASTER : "There are two classes of yogis: the bahudakas and the kutichakas. The bahudakas roam about visiting various holy places and have

not yet found peace of mind. But the kutichakas, having visited all the sacred places, have quieted their minds. Feeling serene and peaceful, they settle down in one place and no longer move about. In that one place they are happy; they don't feel the need of going to any sacred place. If one of them ever visits a place of pilgrimage, it is only for the purpose of new inspiration.

"I had to practise each religion for a time—Hinduism, Islam, Christianity. Furthermore, I followed the paths of the Saktas, Vaishnavas, and Vedantists. I realized that there is only one God toward whom all are travelling; but the paths are different.

"While visiting the holy places, I would sometimes suffer great agony. Once I went with Mathur to Raja Babu's drawing-room in Benares. I found that they talked there only of worldly matters—money, real estate, and the like. At this I burst into tears. I said to the Divine Mother, weeping: 'Mother! Where hast Thou brought me? I was much better off at Dakshineswar.' In Allahabad I noticed the same things that I saw elsewhere—the same ponds, the same grass, the same trees, the same tamarind-leaves.

"But one undoubtedly finds inspiration in a holy place. I accompanied Mathur Babu to Vrindavan. Hriday and the ladies of Mathur's family were in our party. No sooner did I see the Kaliyadaman Ghat than a divine emotion surged up within me. I was completely overwhelmed. Hriday used to bathe me there as if I were a small child.

"In the dusk I would walk on the bank of the Jamuna when the cattle returned along the sandy banks from their pastures. At the very sight of those cows the thought of Krishna would flash in my mind. I would run along like a madman, crying: 'Oh, where is Krishna? Where is my Krishna?'

"I went to Syamakunda and Radhakunda¹¹ in a palanquin and got out to visit the holy Mount Govardhan. At the very sight of the mount I was overpowered with divine emotion and ran to the top. I lost all consciousness of the world around me. The residents of the place helped me to come down. On my way to the sacred pools of Syamakunda and Radhakunda, when I saw the meadows, the trees, the shrubs, the birds, and the deer, I was overcome with ecstasy. My clothes became wet with tears. I said: 'O Krishna! Everything here is as it was in the olden days. You alone are absent.' Seated inside the palanquin I lost all power of speech. Hriday followed the palanquin. He had warned the bearers to be careful about me.

"Gangamayi became very fond of me in Vrindavan. She was an old woman who lived all alone in a hut near the Nidhuvan. Referring to my spiritual condition and ecstasy, she said, 'He is the very embodiment of Radha.' She addressed me as 'Dulali'. When with her, I used to forget my food and drink, my bath, and all thought of going home. On some days Hriday used to bring food from home and feed me. Gangamayi also would serve me with food prepared by her own hands.

"Gangamayi used to experience trances. At such times a great crowd would come to see her. One day, in a state of ecstasy, she climbed on Hriday's shoulders.

¹¹ Places near Mathura associated with the episode of Krishna and Radha.

"I didn't want to leave her and return to Calcutta. Everything was arranged for me to stay with her. I was to eat double-boiled rice, and we were to have our beds on either side of the cottage. All the arrangements had been made, when Hriday said: 'You have such a weak stomach. Who will look after you?' 'Why,' said Gangamayi, 'I shall look after him. I'll nurse him.' As Hriday dragged me by one hand and she by the other, I remembered my mother, who was then living alone here in the nahabat of the temple garden. I found it impossible to stay away from her, and said to Gangamayi, 'No, I must go.' I loved the atmosphere of Vrindavan."

About eleven o'clock the Master took his meal, the offerings from the temple of Kali. After taking his noonday rest he resumed his conversation with the devotees. Every now and then he uttered the holy word "Om" or repeated the sacred names of the deities.

After sunset the evening worship was performed in the temples. Since it was the day of Vijaya, the devotees first saluted the Divine Mother and then took the dust¹⁵ of the Master's feet.

Tuesday, October 24, 1882

It was three or four o'clock in the afternoon. The Master was standing near the shelf where the food was kept, when Balaram and M. arrived from Calcutta and saluted him. Sri Ramakrishna said to them with a smile: "I was going to take some sweets from the shelf, but no sooner did I put my hand on them than a lizard dropped on my body."¹⁶ At once I removed my hand. (All laugh.)

"Oh, yes! One should observe all these things. You see, Rakhal is ill, and my limbs ache too. Do you know what's the matter? This morning as I was leaving my bed I saw¹⁷ a certain person, whom I took for Rakhal. (All laugh.) Oh, yes! Physical features should be studied. The other day Narendra brought one of his friends, a man with only one good eye, though the other eye was not totally blind. I said to myself, 'What is this trouble that Narendra has brought with him?'

"A certain person comes here, but I can't eat any food that he brings. He works in an office at a salary of twenty rupees and earns another twenty by writing false bills. I can't utter a word in his presence, because he tells lies. Sometimes he stays here two or three days without going to his office. Can you guess his purpose? It is that I should recommend him to someone for a job somewhere else.

"Balaram comes from a family of devout Vaishnavas. His father, now an old man, is a pious devotee. He has a tuft of hair on his head, a rosary of tulsi beads round his neck, and a string of beads in his hand. He devotes his time to the repetition of God's name. He owns much property in Orissa and has built temples to Radha-Krishna in Kothar, Vrindavan, and other places, establishing free guest-houses as well.

¹⁵ A form of reverent salutation in which one touches the feet of a superior with one's forehead.

¹⁶ The dropping of a lizard on the body is considered an omen.

¹⁷ Orthodox Hindus in Bengal believe that the first face seen in the morning indicates whether the day will bring good or evil.

• (*To Balaram*) "A certain person came here the other day. I understand he is the slave of that black hag of a wife. Why is it that people do not see God? It is because of the barrier of 'woman and gold'. How impudent he was to say to you the other day, 'A paramahamsa came to my father, who fed him with chicken curry !'¹⁶

"In my present state of mind I can eat a little fish soup if it has been offered to the Divine Mother beforehand. I can't eat any meat, even if it is offered to the Divine Mother; but I taste it with the end of my finger lest She should be angry. (*Laughter.*)

"Well, can you explain this state of my mind? Once I was going from Burdwan to Kamarpukur in a bullock-cart, when a great storm arose. Some people gathered near the cart. My companions said they were robbers. So I began to repeat the names of God, calling sometimes on Kali, sometimes on Rama, sometimes on Hanuman. What do you think of that?"

Was the Master hinting that God is one but is addressed differently by different sects?

MASTER (*to Balaram*): "Maya is nothing but 'woman and gold'. A man living in its midst gradually loses his spiritual alertness. He thinks all is well with him. The scavenger carries a tub of night-soil on his head, and in course of time loses his repulsion to it. One gradually acquires love of God through the practice of chanting God's name and glories. (*To M.*) One should not be ashamed of chanting God's holy name. As the saying goes, 'One does not succeed so long as one has these three : shame, hatred, and fear.'

"At Kamarpukur they sing kirtan very well. The devotional music is sung to the accompaniment of drums.

(*To Balaram*) "Have you installed any image at Vrindavan?"

BALARAM: "Yes, sir. We have a grove where Krishna is worshipped."

MASTER: "I have been to Vrindavan. The Nidhu Grove is very nice indeed."

¹⁶ Orthodox Hindus are forbidden to eat chicken.

V

THE MASTER AND KESHAB

October 27, 1882
11-3-45 S.

IT WAS FRIDAY, the day of the Lakshmi Puja. Keshab Chandra Sen had arranged a boat trip on the Ganges for Sri Ramakrishna.

About four o'clock in the afternoon the steamboat with Keshab and his Brahmo followers cast anchor in the Ganges alongside the Kali temple at Dakshineswar. The passengers saw in front of them the bathing-ghat and the chandni. To their left, in the temple compound, stood six temples of Siva, and to their right another group of six Siva temples. The white steeple of the Kali temple, the tree-tops of the Panchavati, and the silhouette of pine-trees stood high against the blue autumn sky. The gardens between the two nahabats were filled with fragrant flowers, and along the bank of the Ganges were rows of flowering plants. The blue sky was reflected in the brown water of the river, the sacred Ganges, associated with the most ancient traditions of Aryan civilization. The outer world appeared soft and serene, and the hearts of the Brahmo devotees were filled with peace.

Sri Ramakrishna was in his room talking with Vijay and Haralal. Some disciples of Keshab entered. Bowing before the Master, they said to him : "Sir, the steamer has arrived. Keshab Babu has asked us to take you there." A small boat was to carry the Master to the steamer. No sooner did he get into the boat than he lost outer consciousness in samadhi. Vijay was with him.

M. was among the passengers. As the boat came alongside the steamer, all rushed to the railing to have a view of Sri Ramakrishna. Keshab became anxious to get him safely on board. With great difficulty the Master was brought back to consciousness of the world and taken to a cabin in the steamer. Still in an abstracted mood, he walked mechanically, leaning on a devotee for support. Keshab and the others bowed before him, but he was not aware of them. Inside the cabin there were a few chairs and a table. He was made to sit on one of the chairs, Keshab and Vijay occupying two others. Some devotees were also seated, most of them on the floor, while many others had to stand outside. They peered eagerly through the door and windows. Sri Ramakrishna again went into deep samadhi and became totally unconscious of the outer world.

As the air in the room was stuffy because of the crowd of people, Keshab opened the windows. He was embarrassed to meet Vijay, since they had

differed on certain principles of the Brahmo Samaj and Vijay had separated himself from Keshab's organization, joining another society.

The Brahmo devotees looked wistfully at the Master. Gradually he came back to sense consciousness ; but the divine intoxication still lingered. He said to himself in a whisper : "Mother, Why have You brought me here ? They are hedged around and not free. Can I free them ?" Did the Master find that the people assembled there were locked within the prison walls of the world ? Did their helplessness make the Master address these words to the Divine Mother ?

Sri Ramakrishna was gradually becoming conscious of the outside world. Nilmadhav of Ghazipur and a Brahmo devotee were talking about Pavhari Baba. Another Brahmo devotee said to the Master : "Sir, these gentlemen visited Pavhari Baba. He lives in Ghazipur. He is a holy man like yourself." The Master could hardly talk ; he only smiled. The devotee continued, "Sir, Pavhari Baba keeps your photograph in his room." Pointing to his body the Master said with a smile, "Just a pillow-case."

The Master continued : "But you should remember that the heart of the devotee is the abode of God. He dwells, no doubt, in all beings, but He especially manifests Himself in the heart of the devotee. A landlord may at one time or another visit all parts of his estate, but people say he is generally to be found in a particular drawing-room. The heart of the devotee is the drawing-room of God.

"He who is called Brahman by the jnanis is known as Atman by the yogis and as Bhagavan by the bhaktas. The same brahmin is called priest, when worshipping in the temple, and cook, when preparing a meal in the kitchen. The jnani, sticking to the path of knowledge, always reasons about the Reality, saying, 'Not this, not this'. Brahman is neither 'this' nor 'that'; It is neither the universe nor its living beings. Reasoning in this way, the mind becomes steady. Then it disappears and the aspirant goes into samadhi. This is the Knowledge of Brahman. It is the unwavering conviction of the jnani that Brahman alone is real and the world illusory. All these names and forms are illusory, like a dream. What Brahman is cannot be described. One cannot even say that Brahman is a Person. This is the opinion of the jnanis, the followers of Vedanta philosophy.

"But the bhaktas accept all the states of consciousness. They take the waking state to be real also. They don't think the world to be illusory, like a dream. They say that the universe is a manifestation of God's power and glory. God has created all these—sky, stars, moon, sun, mountains, ocean, men, animals. They constitute His glory. He is within us, in our hearts. Again, He is outside. The most advanced devotees say that He himself has become all this—the twenty-four cosmic principles, the universe, and all living beings. The devotee of God wants to eat sugar, not to become sugar. (All laugh.)

"Do you know how a lover of God feels ? His attitude is : 'O God, Thou art the Master, and I am Thy servant. Thou art the Mother, and I am Thy child.' Or again : 'Thou art my Father and Mother. Thou art the Whole, and I am a part.' He doesn't like to say, 'I am Brahman.'



"The yogi seeks to realize the Paramatman, the Supreme Soul. His ideal is the union of the embodied soul and the Supreme Soul. He withdraws his mind from sense-objects and tries to concentrate it on the Paramatman. Therefore, during the first stage of his spiritual discipline, he retires into solitude and with undivided attention practises meditation in a fixed posture.

"But the Reality is one and the same. The difference is only in name. He who is Brahman is verily Atman, and again, He is the Bhagavan. He is Brahman to the followers of the path of knowledge, Paramatman to the yogis, and Bhagavan to the lovers of God."

The steamer had been going toward Calcutta ; but the passengers, with their eyes fixed on the Master and their ears given to his nectar-like words, were oblivious of its motion. Dakshineswar, with its temples and gardens, was left behind. The paddles of the boat churned the waters of the Ganges with a murmuring sound. But the devotees were indifferent to all this. Spellbound, they looked on a great yogi, his face lighted with a divine smile, his countenance radiating love, his eyes sparkling with joy—a man who had renounced all for God and who knew nothing but God. Unceasing words of wisdom flowed from his lips.

MASTER : "The jnanis, who adhere to the non-dualistic philosophy of Vedanta, say that the acts of creation, preservation, and destruction, the universe itself and all its living beings, are the manifestations of Sakti, the Divine Power.¹ If you reason it out, you will realize that all these are as illusory as a dream. Brahman alone is the Reality, and all else is unreal. Even this very Sakti is unsubstantial, like a dream.

"But though you reason all your life, unless you are established in samadhi, you cannot go beyond the jurisdiction of Sakti. Even when you say, 'I am meditating'; or 'I am contemplating'; still you are moving in the realm of Sakti, within its power.

"Thus Brahman and Sakti are identical. If you accept the one, you must accept the other. It is like fire and its power to burn. If you see the fire, you must recognize its power to burn also. You cannot think of fire without its power to burn, nor can you think of the power to burn without fire. You cannot conceive of the sun's rays without the sun, nor can you conceive of the sun without its rays.

"What is milk like ? Oh, you say, it is something white. You cannot think of the milk without the whiteness, and again, you cannot think of the whiteness without the milk.

"Thus one cannot think of Brahman without Sakti, or of Sakti without Brahman. One cannot think of the Absolute without the Relative, or of the Relative without the Absolute.

"The Primordial Power is ever at play.² She is creating, preserving, and destroying in play, as it were. This Power is called Kali. Kali is verily Brahman, and Brahman is verily Kali. It is one and the same Reality. When we think of It as inactive, that is to say, not engaged in the acts of creation,

¹ Known as maya in the Vedanta philosophy.

² This idea introduces the elements of spontaneity and freedom in the creation.

preservation, and destruction, then we call It Brahman. But when It engages in these activities, then we call It Kali or Sakti. The Reality is one and the same ; the difference is in name and form.

"It is like water, called in different languages by different names, such as 'jal', 'pani', and so forth. There are three or four ghats on a lake. The Hindus, who drink water at one place, call it 'jal'. The Mussalmans at another place call it 'pani'. And the English at a third place call it 'water'. All three denote one and the same thing, the difference being in the name only. In the same way, some address the Reality as 'Allah', some as 'God', some as 'Brahman', some as 'Kali', and others by such names as 'Rama', 'Jesus', 'Durga', 'Hari'."

KESHAB (*with a smile*) : "Describe to us, sir, in how many ways Kali, the Divine Mother, sports in this world."

MASTER (*with a smile*) : "Oh, She plays in different ways. It is She alone who is known as Maha-Kali, Nitya-Kali, Smasana-Kali, Raksha-Kali, and Syama-Kali. Maha-Kali and Nitya-Kali are mentioned in the Tantra philosophy. When there were neither the creation, nor the sun, the moon, the planets, and the earth, and when darkness was enveloped in darkness, then the Mother, the Formless One, Maha-Kali, the Great Power, was one with Maha-Kala, the Absolute.

"Syama-Kali has a somewhat tender aspect and is worshipped in the Hindu households. She is the Dispenser of boons and the Dispeller of fear. People worship Raksha-Kali, the Protectress, in times of epidemic, famine, earthquake, drought, and flood. Smasana-Kali is the embodiment of the power of destruction. She resides in the cremation ground, surrounded by corpses, jackals, and terrible female spirits. From Her mouth flows a stream of blood, from Her neck hangs a garland of human heads, and around Her waist is a girdle made of human hands.

"After the destruction of the universe, at the end of a great cycle, the Divine Mother gathers the seeds for the next creation. She is like the elderly mistress of the house, who has a hotchpotch-pot in which she keeps different articles for household use. (*All laugh.*)

"Oh, yes ! Housewives have pots like that, where they keep 'sea-foam',² blue pills, small bundles of seeds of cucumber, pumpkin, and gourd, and so on. They take them out when they want them. In the same way, after the destruction of the universe, my Divine Mother, the Embodiment of Brahman, gathers together the seeds for the next creation. After the creation the Primal Power dwells in the universe itself. She brings forth this phenomenal world and then pervades it. In the Vedas creation is likened to the spider and its web. The spider brings the web out of itself and then remains in it. God is the container of the universe and also what is contained in it.

"Is Kali, my Divine Mother, of a black complexion ? She appears black because She is viewed from a distance ; but when intimately known She is no longer so. The sky appears blue at a distance ; but look at it close by and

² The Master perhaps referred to the cuttlefish bone found on the seashore. The popular belief is that it is hardened sea-foam.

you will find that it has no colour. The water of the ocean looks blue⁵ at a distance, but when you go near and take it in your hand, you find that it is colourless."

The Master became intoxicated with divine love and sang :

Is Kali, my Mother, really black ?
The Naked One, of blackest hue,
Lights the Lotus of the Heart. . . .

The Master continued : " Bondage and liberation are both of Her making. By Her maya worldly people become entangled in ' woman and gold ', and again, through Her grace they attain their liberation. She is called the Saviour, and the Remover of the bondage that binds one to the world."

Then the Master sang the following song ' in his melodious voice :

In the world's busy market-place, O Syama, Thou art flying kites ;
High up they soar on the wind of hope, held fast by maya's string.
Their frames are human skeletons, their sails of the three gunas
made ;
But all their curious workmanship is merely for ornament.
Upon the kite-strings Thou hast rubbed the manja-paste⁶ of world-
liness,
So as to make each straining strand all the more sharp and strong.
Out of a hundred thousand kites, at best but one or two break free ;
And Thou dost laugh and clap Thy hands, O Mother, watching
them !
On favouring winds, says Ramprasad, the kites set loose will
speedily
Be borne away to the Infinite, across the sea of the world.

The Master said : " The Divine Mother is always playful and sportive. This universe is Her play. She is self-willed and must always have Her own way. She is full of bliss. [She gives freedom to one out of a hundred thousand.]

A BRAHMO DEVOTEE : " But, sir, if She likes, She can give freedom to all. Why, then, has She kept us bound to the world ? "

MASTER : " That is Her will. She wants to continue playing with Her created beings. In a game of hide-and-seek⁷ the running about soon stops if in the beginning all the players touch the ' granny '. If all touch her, then how can the game go on ? That displeases her. Her pleasure is in continuing the game. Therefore the poet said :

Out of a hundred thousand kites, at best but one or two break free ;
And Thou dost laugh and clap Thy hands, O Mother, watching
them !

⁵ The allusion of this song is to the well-known kite-flying competitions in India. Several people fly their kites and try to cut one another's kite-strings. Whoever has his string cut loses his kite and quits the game.

⁶ A glue of barley and powdered glass.

⁷ The allusion is to the Indian game of hide-and-seek, in which the leader, known as the "granny", bandages the eyes of the players and hides herself. The players are supposed to find her. If any player can touch her, the bandage is removed from his eyes and he is released from the game.

• "It is as if the Divine Mother said to the human mind in confidence, with a sign from Her eye, 'Go and enjoy the world.' How can one blame the mind? The mind can disentangle itself from worldliness if, through Her grace, She makes it turn toward Herself. Only then does it become devoted to the Lotus Feet of the Divine Mother."

Whereupon Sri Ramakrishna, taking upon himself, as it were, the agonies of all householders, sang a song complaining to the Divine Mother :

Mother, this is the grief that sorely grieves my heart,
That even with Thee for Mother, and though I am wide awake,
There should be robbery in my house.
Many and many a time I vow to call on Thee,
Yet when the time for prayer comes round, I have forgotten.
Now I see it is all Thy trick.

As Thou hast never given, so Thou receivest naught ;
Am I to blame for this, O Mother ? Hadst Thou but given,
Surely then Thou hadst received ;
Out of Thine own gifts I should have given to Thee.
Glory and shame, bitter and sweet, are Thine alone ;
This world is nothing but Thy play.
Then why, O Blissful One, dost Thou cause a rift in it ?

Says Ramprasad : Thou hast bestowed on me this mind,
And with a knowing wink of Thine eye
Bidden it, at the same time, to go and enjoy the world.
And so I wander here forlorn through Thy creation,
Blasted, as it were, by someone's evil glance,
Taking the bitter for the sweet,
Taking the unreal for the Real.

The Master continued : "Men are deluded through Her maya and have become attached to the world."

Says Ramprasad : Thou hast bestowed on me this mind,
And with a knowing wink of Thine eye
Bidden it, at the same time, to go and enjoy the world."

BRAHMO DEVOTEE : "Sir, can't we realize God without complete renunciation?"

MASTER (*with a laugh*) : "Of course you can ! Why should you renounce everything? You are all right as you are, following the middle path—like molasses partly solid and partly liquid. Do you know the game of nax?⁷ Having scored the maximum number of points, I am out of the game. I can't enjoy it. But you are very clever. Some of you have scored ten points, some six, and some five. You have scored just the right number ; so you are not out of the game like me. The game can go on. Why, that's fine ! (*All laugh*.)

"I tell you the truth : there is nothing wrong in your being in the world. But you must direct your mind toward God ; otherwise you will not succeed."

⁷ In the Indian card-game of nax the object is to stay in the game by scoring under seventeen points. Anyone scoring seventeen points or more has to retire.

| Do your duty with one hand and with the other hold to God. After the duty is over, you will hold to God with both hands.

" It is all a question of the mind. Bondage and liberation are of the mind alone. The mind will take the colour you dye it with. It is like white clothes just returned from the laundry. If you dip them in red dye, they will be red. If you dip them in blue or green, they will be blue or green. They will take only the colour you dip them in, whatever it may be. Haven't you noticed that, if you read a little English, you at once begin to utter English words : *Foot fut it mil?*⁸ Then you put on boots and whistle a tune, and so on. It all goes together. Or, if a scholar studies Sanskrit, he will at once rattle off Sanskrit verses. If you are in bad company, then you will talk and think like your companions. On the other hand, when you are in the company of devotees, you will think and talk only of God.

" The mind is everything. A man has his wife on one side and his daughter on the other. He shows his affection to them in different ways. But his mind is one and the same.

" Bondage is of the mind, and freedom is also of the mind. A man is free if he constantly thinks : ' I am a free soul. How can I be bound, whether I live in the world or in the forest ? I am a child of God, the King of Kings. Who can bind me ? ' If bitten by a snake, a man may get rid of its venom by saying emphatically, ' There is no poison in me.' In the same way, by repeating with grit and determination, ' I am not bound, I am free ', one really becomes so—one really becomes free.

13-5 Once someone gave me a book of the Christians. I asked him to read it to me. It talked about nothing but sin. (To Keshab) Sin is the only thing one hears of at your Brahmo Samaj, too. The wretch who constantly says, ' I am bound, I am bound ' only succeeds in being bound. He who says day and night, ' I am a sinner, I am a sinner ' verily becomes a sinner.

" One should have such burning faith in God that one can say : ' What ? I have repeated the name of God, and can sin still cling to me ? How can I be a sinner any more ? How can I be in bondage any more ? '

" If a man repeats the name of God, his body, mind, and everything become pure. Why should one talk only about sin and hell, and such things ? Say but once, ' O Lord, I have undoubtedly done wicked things, but I won't repeat them. And have faith in His name. '

Sri Ramakrishna became intoxicated with divine love and sang :

If only I can pass away repeating Durga's name,
How canst Thou then, O Blessed One.
Withhold from me deliverance,
Wretched though I may be . . .

Then he said : " To my Divine Mother I prayed only for pure love. I offered flowers at Her Lotus Feet and prayed to Her : ' Mother, here is Thy virtue, here is Thy vice. Take them both and grant me only pure love for Thee. Here is Thy knowledge, here is Thy ignorance. Take them both and grant me only pure love for Thee. Here is Thy purity, here is Thy impurity.

⁸ The Master was merely mimicking the sound of English.

Take them both, Mother, and grant me only pure love for Thee. Here is Thy dharma, here is Thy adharma. Take them both, Mother, and grant me only pure love for Thee.'

(To the Brahmo devotees) " Now listen to a song by Ramprasad :

Come, let us go for a walk, O mind, to Kali, the Wish-fulfilling Tree.

And there beneath It gather the four fruits of life.

Of your two wives, Dispassion and Worldliness,

Bring along Dispassion only, on your way to the Tree,

And ask her son Discrimination about the Truth.

When will you learn to lie, O mind, in the abode of Blessedness,
With Cleanliness and Defilement on either side of you ?

Only when you have found the way

To keep these wives contentedly under a single roof,

Will you behold the matchless form of Mother Syama.

Ego and Ignorance, your parents, instantly banish from your sight :

And should Delusion seek to drag you to its hole,

Manfully cling to the pillar of Patience.

Tie to the post of Unconcern the goats of Vice and Virtue,

Killing them with the sword of Knowledge if they rebel.

With the children of Worldliness, your first wife, plead from a
goodly distance,

And, if they will not listen, drown them in Wisdom's sea.

Says Ramprasad : If you do as I say,

You can submit a good account, O mind, to the King of Death,

And I shall be well pleased with you and call you my darling.

" Why shouldn't one be able to realize God in this world ? King Janaka had such realization. Ramprasad described the world as a mere ' framework of illusion '. But if one loves God's hallowed feet, then—

This very world is a mansion of mirth ;

Here I can eat, here drink and make merry,

Janaka's might was unsurpassed ;

What did he lack of the world or the Spirit ?

Holding to one as well as the other,

He drank his milk from a brimming cup !

(All laugh.)

" But one cannot be a King Janaka all of a sudden. Janaka at first practised much austerity in solitude.

" Even if one lives in the world, one must go into solitude now and then. It will be of great help to a man if he goes away from his family, lives alone, and weeps for God even for three days. Even if he thinks of God for one day in solitude, when he has the leisure, that too will do him good. People shed a whole jug of tears for wife and children. But who cries for the Lord ? Now and then one must go into solitude and practise spiritual discipline to realize God. Living in the world and entangled in many of its duties, the aspirant, during the

first stage of spiritual life, finds many obstacles in the path of concentration. While the trees on the foot-path are young, they must be fenced around ; otherwise they will be destroyed by cattle. The fence is necessary when the tree is young, but it can be taken away when the trunk is thick and strong. Then the tree won't be hurt even if an elephant is tied to it.

"The disease of worldliness is like typhoid. And there are a huge jug of water and a jar of savoury pickles in the typhoid patient's room. If you want to cure him of his illness, you must remove him from that room. The worldly man is like the typhoid patient. The various objects of enjoyment are the huge jug of water, and the craving for their enjoyment is his thirst. The very thought of pickles makes the mouth water ; you don't have to bring them near. And he is surrounded with them. The companionship of woman is the pickles. Hence treatment in solitude is necessary."

"One may enter the world after attaining discrimination and dispassion. In the ocean of the world there are six alligators : lust, anger, and so forth. But you need not fear the alligators if you smear your body with turmeric before you go into the water. Discrimination and dispassion are the turmeric. Discrimination is the knowledge of what is real and what is unreal. It is the realization that God alone is the real and eternal Substance and that all else is unreal, transitory, impermanent. And you must cultivate intense zeal for God. You must feel love for Him and be attracted to Him. The gopis of Vrindavan felt the attraction of Krishna. Let me sing you a song :

Listen ! The flute has sounded in yonder wood.
There I must fly, for Krishna waits on the path.
Tell me, friends, will you come along or no ?
To you my Krishna is merely an empty name ;
To me He is the anguish of my heart.
You hear His flute-notes only with your ears,
But, oh, I hear them in my deepest soul.
I hear His flute calling : 'Radha, come out !
Without you the grove is shorn of its loveliness.'"

The Master sang the song with tears in his eyes, and said to Keshab and the other Brahmo-devotees : "Whether you accept Radha and Krishna, or not, please do accept their attraction for each other. Try to create that same yearning in your heart for God. Yearning is all you need in order to realize Him."

Gradually the ebb-tide set in. The steamboat was speeding toward Calcutta. It passed under the Howrah Bridge and came within sight of the Botanical Garden. The captain was asked to go a little farther down the river. The passengers were enchanted with the Master's words, and most of them had no idea of time or of how far they had come.

Keshab began to serve some puffed rice and grated coconut. The guests held these in the folds of their wearing-cloths and presently started to eat. Everyone was joyful. The Master noticed, however, that Keshab and Vijay rather shrank from each other, and he was anxious to reconcile them.

MASTER (to Keshab) : "Look here. There is Vijay. Your quarrel seems like the fight between Siva and Rama. Siya was Rama's guru. Though they

fought with each other, yet they soon came to terms. But the grimaces of the ghosts, the followers of Siva, and the gibberish of the monkeys, the followers of Rama, would not come to an end ! (*Loud laughter.*) Such quarrels take place even among one's own kith and kin. Didn't Rama fight with His own sons, Lava and Kusa ? Again, you must have noticed how a mother and daughter, living together and having the same spiritual end in view, observe their religious fast separately on Tuesdays, each on her own account —as if the welfare of the mother were different from the welfare of the daughter. But what benefits the one benefits the other. In like manner, you have a religious society, and Vijay thinks he must have one too. (*Laughter.*) But I think all these are necessary. While Sri Krishna, Himself God Incarnate, played with the gopis at Vrindavan, trouble-makers like Jatila and Kutila appeared on the scene. You may ask why. The answer is that the play does not develop without trouble-makers. (*All laugh.*) There is no fun without Jatila and Kutila. (*Loud laughter.*)

"Ramanuja upheld the doctrine of Qualified Non-dualism. But his guru was a pure non-dualist. They disagreed with each other and refuted each other's arguments. That always happens. Still, to the teacher the disciple is his own."

All rejoiced in the Master's company and his words.

MASTER (*to Keshab*) : "You don't look into people's natures before you make them your disciples, and so they break away from you."

"All men look alike, to be sure, but they have different natures; Some have an excess of sattva, others an excess of rajas, and still others an excess of tamas. You must have noticed that the cakes known as puli all look alike. But their contents are very different. Some contain condensed milk, some coconut kernel, and others mere boiled kalai pulse. (*All laugh.*)

"Do you know my attitude ? As for myself, I eat, drink, and live happily. The rest the Divine Mother knows. Indeed, there are three words that prick my flesh : 'guru', 'master', and 'father'.

"There is only one Guru, and that is Satchidananda. He alone is the Teacher. My attitude toward God is that of a child toward its mother. One can get human gurus by the million. All want to be teachers. But who cares to be a disciple ?

"It is extremely difficult to teach others. A man can teach only if God reveals Himself to him and gives the command. Narada, Sukadeva, and sages like them had such a command from God, and Sankara had it too. Unless you have a command from God, who will listen to your words ?

"Don't you know how easily the people of Calcutta get excited ? The milk in the kettle puffs up and boils as long as the fire burns underneath. Take away the fuel and all becomes quiet. The people of Calcutta love sensations. You may see them digging a well at a certain place. They say they want water. But if they strike a stone they give up that place ; they begin at another place. And there, perchance, they find sand ; they give up the second place too. Next they begin at a third. And so it goes. But it won't do if a man only imagines that he has God's command.

"God does reveal Himself to man and speak. Only then may one receive His command. How forceful are the words of such a teacher! They can move mountains. But mere lectures? People will listen to them for a few days and then forget them. They will never act upon mere words."

"At Kamarpukur there is a small lake called the Haldarpukur. Certain people used to befoul its banks every day. Others who came there in the morning to bathe would abuse the offenders loudly. But next morning they would find the same thing. The nuisance didn't stop. (*All laugh.*) The villagers finally informed the authorities about it. A constable was sent, who put up a notice on the bank which read : 'Commit no nuisance.' This stopped the miscreants at once. (*All laugh.*)

"To teach others, one must have a badge of authority ; otherwise teaching becomes a mockery. A man who is himself ignorant starts out to teach others—like the blind leading the blind! Instead of doing good, such teaching does harm. After the realization of God one obtains an inner vision. Only then can one diagnose a person's spiritual malady and give instruction."

"Without the commission from God, a man becomes vain. He says to himself, 'I am teaching people.' This vanity comes from ignorance, for only an ignorant person feels that he is the doer. A man verily becomes liberated in life if he feels : 'God is the Doer. He alone is doing everything. I am doing nothing.' Man's sufferings and worries spring only from his persistent thought that he is the doer."

"You people speak of doing good to the world. Is the world such a small thing? And who are you, pray, to do good to the world? First realize God, see Him by means of spiritual discipline. If He imparts power, then you can do good to others ; otherwise not."

A BRAHMO DEVOTEE : "Then, sir, we must give up our activities until we realize God?"

MASTER : "No. Why should you? You must engage in such activities as contemplation, singing His praises, and other daily devotions."

BRAHMO : "But what about our worldly duties—duties associated with our earning money, and so on?"

MASTER : "Yes, you can perform them too, but only as much as you need for your livelihood. At the same time, you must pray to God in solitude, with tears in your eyes, that you may be able to perform those duties in an unselfish manner. You should say to Him : 'O God, make my worldly duties fewer and fewer; otherwise, O Lord, I find that I forget Thee when I am involved in too many activities. I may think I am doing unselfish work, but it turns out to be selfish.' People who carry to excess the giving of alms, or the distributing of food among the poor, fall victims to the desire of acquiring name and fame."

"Sambhu Mallick once talked about establishing hospitals, dispensaries, and schools, making roads, digging public reservoirs, and so forth. I said to him : 'Don't go out of your way to look for such works. Undertake only those works that present themselves to you and are of pressing necessity—and those also in a spirit of detachment.' It is not good to become involved in many

activities. That makes one forget God. Coming to the Kalighat temple, some, perhaps, spend their whole time in giving alms to the poor. They have no time to see the Mother in the inner shrine! (Laughter.) First of all manage somehow to see the image of the Divine Mother, even by pushing through the crowd. Then you may or may not give alms, as you wish. You may give to the poor to your heart's content, if you feel that way. Work is only a means to the realization of God. Therefore I said to Sambhu, 'Suppose God appears before you; then will you ask Him to build hospitals and dispensaries for you?' (Laughter.) A lover of God never says that. He will rather say: 'O Lord, give me a place at Thy Lotus Feet. Keep me always in Thy company. Give me sincere and pure love for Thee.'

"Karmayoga is very hard indeed. In the Kaliyuga it is extremely difficult to perform the rites enjoined in the scriptures. Nowadays man's life is centred on food alone. He cannot perform many scriptural rites. Suppose a man is laid up with fever. If you attempt a slow cure with the old-fashioned indigenous remedies, before long his life may be snuffed out. He can't stand much delay. Nowadays the drastic 'D. Gupta'⁹ mixture is appropriate. In the Kaliyuga the best way is bhaktiyoga, the path of devotion—singing the praises of the Lord, and prayer. The path of devotion alone is the religion for this age. (To the Brahmo devotees) Yours also is the path of devotion. Blessed you are indeed that you chant the name of Hari and sing the Divine Mother's glories. I like your attitude. You don't call the world a dream, like the non-dualists. You are not Brahmajnanis like them; you are bhaktas, lovers of God. That you speak of Him as a Person is also good. You are devotees. You will certainly realize Him if you call on Him with sincerity and earnestness."

The boat cast anchor at Kayalaghata and the passengers prepared to disembark. On coming outside they noticed that the full moon was up. The trees, the buildings, and the boats on the Ganges were bathed in its mellow light. A carriage was hailed for the Master, and M. and a few devotees got in with him. The Master asked for Keshab. Presently the latter arrived and inquired about the arrangements made for the Master's return to Dakshineswar. Then he bowed low and took leave of Sri Ramakrishna.

The carriage drove through the European quarter of the city. The Master enjoyed the sight of the beautiful mansions on both sides of the well lighted streets. Suddenly he said: "I am thirsty. What's to be done?" Nandalal, Keshab's nephew, stopped the carriage before the India Club and went upstairs to get some water. The Master inquired whether the glass had been well washed. On being assured that it had been, he drank the water.

As the carriage went along, the Master put his head out of the window and looked with childlike enjoyment at the people, the vehicles, the horses, and the streets, all flooded with moonlight. Now and then he heard European ladies singing at the piano. He was in a very happy mood.

⁹ A patent fever medicine containing a strong dose of quinine.

The carriage arrived at the house of Suresh Mitra, who was a great devotee of the Master and whom he addressed affectionately as Surendra. He was not at home.

The members of the household opened a room on the ground floor for the Master and his party. The cab fare was to be paid. Surendra would have taken care of it had he been there. The Master said to a devotee : "Why don't you ask the ladies to pay the fare ? They certainly know that their master visits us at Dakshineswar. I am not a stranger to them." *(All laugh.)*

Narendra, who lived in that quarter of the city, was sent for. In the mean time Sri Ramakrishna and the devotees were invited to the drawing-room upstairs. The floor of the room was covered with a carpet and a white sheet. A few cushions were lying about. On the wall hung an oil painting especially painted for Surendra, in which Sri Ramakrishna was pointing out to Keshab the harmony of Christianity, Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism, and other religions. On seeing the picture Keshab had once said, "Blessed is the man who conceived the idea."

Sri Ramakrishna was talking joyously with the devotees, when Narendra arrived. This made the Master doubly happy. He said to his young disciple, "We had a boat trip with Keshab today. Vijay and many other Brahmo devotees were there. *(Pointing to M.)* Ask him what I said to Keshab and Vijay about the mother and daughter observing their religious fast on Tuesdays, each on her own account, though the welfare of the one meant the welfare of the other. I also said to Keshab that trouble-makers like Jatila and Kutila were necessary to lend zest to the play. *(To M.)* Isn't that so ?"

M : "Yes, sir. Quite so."

It was late. Surendra had not yet returned. The Master had to leave for the temple garden, and a cab was brought for him. M. and Narendra saluted him and took their leave. Sri Ramakrishna's carriage started for Dakshineswar through the moonlit streets. *15.3.45.*

VI

THE MASTER WITH THE BRAHMO DEVOTEES (I)

October 28, 1882

12-3-45

IT WAS SATURDAY. The semi-annual Brahmo festival, celebrated each autumn and spring, was being held in Benimadhav Pal's beautiful garden house at Sinthi, about three miles north of Calcutta. The house stood in a secluded place suited for contemplation. Trees laden with flowers, artificial lakes with grassy banks, and green arbours enhanced the beauty of the grounds. Just as the fleecy clouds were turning gold in the light of the setting sun, the Master arrived.

Many devotees had attended the morning devotions, and in the afternoon people from Calcutta and the neighbouring villages joined them. Shivanath, the great Brahmo devotee whom the Master loved dearly, was one of the large gathering of members of the Brahmo Samaj who had been eagerly awaiting Sri Ramakrishna's arrival.

When the carriage bringing the Master and a few devotees reached the garden house, the assembly stood up respectfully to receive him. There was a sudden silence, like that which comes when the curtain in a theatre is about to be rung up. People who had been conversing with one another now fixed their attention on the Master's serene face, eager not to lose one word that might fall from his lips.

At the sight of Shivanath the Master cried out joyously : " Ah ! Here is Shivanath ! You see, you are a devotee of God. The very sight of you gladdens my heart. One hemp-smoker feels very happy to meet another. Very often they embrace each other in an exuberance of joy."

The devotees burst out laughing.

MASTER : " Many people visit the temple garden at Dakshineswar. If I see some among the visitors indifferent to God, I say to them, ' You had better sit over there.' Or sometimes I say, ' Go and see the beautiful buildings.' (Laughter.)

* Sometimes I find that the devotees of God are accompanied by worthless people. Their companions are immersed in gross worldliness and don't enjoy spiritual talk at all. Since the devotees keep on, for a long time, talking with me about God, the others become restless. Finding it impossible to sit there any longer, they whisper to their devotee friends : ' When shall we be going ? How long will you stay here ? ' The devotees say : ' Wait a bit. We shall go



after a little while.' Then the worldly people say in a disgusted tone : 'Well then, you can talk. We shall wait for you in the boat.' (All laugh.)

Worldly people will never listen to you if you ask them to renounce everything and devote themselves whole-heartedly to God. Therefore Chaitanya and Nitai, after some deliberation, made an arrangement to attract the worldly. They would say to such persons, 'Come, repeat the name of Hari, and you shall have a delicious soup of magur fish and the embrace of a young woman.' Many people, attracted by the fish and the woman, would chant the name of God. After tasting a little of the nectar of God's hallowed name, they would soon realize that the 'fish soup' really meant the tears they shed for love of God, while the 'young woman' signified the earth. The embrace of the woman meant rolling on the ground in the rapture of Divine love.

Nitai would employ any means to make people repeat Hari's name. Chaitanya said : 'The name of God has very great sanctity. It may not produce an immediate result, but one day it must bear fruit. It is like a seed that has been left on the cornice of a building. After many days the house crumbles, and the seed falls on the earth, germinates, and at last bears fruit.'

As worldly people are endowed with sattva, rajas, and tamas, so also is bhakti characterized by the three gunas.

Do you know what a worldly person endowed with sattva is like ? Perhaps his house is in a dilapidated condition here and there. He doesn't care to repair it. The worship hall may be strewn with pigeon droppings and the courtyard covered with moss, but he pays no attention to these things. The furniture of the house may be old ; he doesn't think of polishing it and making it look neat. He doesn't care for dress at all ; anything is good enough for him. But the man himself is very gentle, quiet, kind, and humble ; he doesn't injure anyone.

Again, among the worldly there are people with the traits of rajas. Such a man has a watch and chain, and two or three rings on his fingers. The furniture of his house is all spick and span. On the walls hang portraits of the Queen, the Prince of Wales, and other prominent people ; the building is white-washed and spotlessly clean. His wardrobe is filled with a large assortment of clothes ; even the servants have their livery, and all that.

The traits of a worldly man endowed with tamas are sleep, lust, anger, egotism, and the like.

Similarly, bhakti, devotion, has its sattva. A devotee who possesses it meditates on God in absolute secret, perhaps inside his mosquito net. Others think he is asleep. Since he is late in getting up, they think perhaps he has not slept well during the night. His love for the body goes only as far as appeasing his hunger, and that only by means of rice and simple greens. There is no elaborate arrangement about his meals, no luxury in clothes, and no display of furniture. Besides, such a devotee never flatters anybody for money.

An aspirant possessed of rajasic bhakti puts a tilak¹ on his forehead and a necklace of holy rudraksha beads, interspersed with gold ones, around his neck. (All laugh.) At worship he wears a silk cloth.

¹ A mark of sandal-paste or other material to denote one's religious affiliation.

• • "A man endowed with tamasic bhakti has burning faith. Such a devotee literally extorts boons from God, even as a robber falls upon a man and plunders his money. 'Bind ! Beat ! Kill !'—that is his way, the way of the dacoits."

Saying this, the Master began to sing in a voice sweet with rapturous love, his eyes turned upward :

Why should I go to Ganga or Gaya, to Kasi, Kanchi, or Prabhas,²
So long as I can breathe my last with Kali's name upon my lips ?
What need of rituals has a man, what need of devotions any more,
If he repeats the Mother's name at the three holy hours ?³
Rituals may pursue him close, but never can they overtake him.
Charity, vows, and giving of gifts do not appeal to Madan's⁴ mind ;
The Blissful Mother's Lotus Feet are his whole prayer and sacrifice.
Who could ever have conceived the power Her name possesses ?
Siva Himself, the God of Gods, sings Her praise with His five mouths !

The Master was beside himself with love for the Divine Mother. He sang with fiery enthusiasm :

If only I can pass away repeating Durga's name,
How canst Thou then, O Blessed One,
Withhold from me deliverance,
Wretched though I may be ? . . .

Then he said, "One must take the firm attitude : 'What ? I have chanted the Mother's name. How can I be a sinner any more ? I am Her child, heir to Her powers and glories.'

"If you can give a spiritual turn to your tamas, you can realize God with its help. Force your demands on God. He is by no means a stranger to you. He is indeed your very own.

"Again, you see, the quality of tamas can be used for the welfare of others. There are three classes of physicians : superior, mediocre, and inferior. The physician who feels the patient's pulse and just says to him, 'Take the medicine regularly' belongs to the inferior class. He doesn't care to inquire whether or not the patient has actually taken the medicine. The mediocre physician is he who in various ways persuades the patient to take the medicine, and says to him sweetly : 'My good man, how will you be cured unless you use the medicine ? Take this medicine. I have made it for you myself.' But he who, finding the patient stubbornly refusing to take the medicine, forces it down his throat, going so far as to put his knee on the patient's chest is the best physician. This is the manifestation of the tamas of the physician. It doesn't injure the patient ; on the contrary, it does him good.

"Like the physicians, there are three types of religious teachers. The inferior teacher only gives instruction to the disciples but makes no inquiries about their progress. The mediocre teacher, for the good of the student, makes repeated efforts to bring the instruction home to him, begs him to

² Five places of pilgrimage.

³ Dawn, noon, and dusk.

⁴ The author of the song.

assimilate it, and shows him love in many other ways. But there is a type of teacher who goes to the length of using force when he finds the student persistently unyielding : I call him the best teacher."

A BRAHMO DEVOTEE : "Sir, has God forms or has He none ?"

MASTER : "No one can say with finality that God is only 'this' and nothing else. He is formless, and again He has forms. For the bhakta He assumes forms. But He is formless for the jnani, that is, for him who looks on the world as a mere dream. The bhakta feels that he is one entity and the world another. Therefore God reveals Himself to him as a Person. But the jnani—the Vedantist, for instance—always reasons, applying the process of 'Not this, not this'. Through this discrimination he realizes, by his inner perception, that the ego and the universe are both illusory, like a dream. Then the jnani realizes Brahman in his own consciousness. He cannot describe what Brahman is.

"Do you know what I mean ? Think of Brahman, Existence-Knowledge-Bliss Absolute, as a shoreless ocean. Through the cooling influence, as it were, of the bhakta's love, the water has frozen at places into blocks of ice. In other words, God now and then assumes various forms for His lovers and reveals Himself to them as a Person. But with the rising of the sun of Knowledge, the blocks of ice melt. Then one doesn't feel any more that God is a Person, nor does one see God's forms. What He is cannot be described. Who will describe Him ? He who would do so disappears. He cannot find his 'I' any more.

"If one analyses oneself, one doesn't find any such thing as 'I'. Take an onion, for instance. First of all you peel off the red outer skin ; then you find thick white skins. Peel these off one after the other, and you won't find anything inside.

"In that state a man no longer finds the existence of his ego. And who is there left to seek it ? Who can describe how he feels in that state—in his own Pure Consciousness—about the real nature of Brahman ? Once a salt doll went to measure the depth of the ocean. No sooner was it in the water than it melted. Now who was to tell the depth ?

"There is a sign of Perfect Knowledge. Man becomes silent when it is attained. Then the 'I', which may be likened to the salt doll, melts in the Ocean of Existence-Knowledge-Bliss Absolute and becomes one with It. Not the slightest trace of distinction is left.

"As long as his self-analysis is not complete, man argues with much ado. But he becomes silent when he completes it. When the empty pitcher has been filled with water, when the water inside the pitcher becomes one with the water of the lake outside, no more sound is heard. Sound comes from the pitcher as long as the pitcher is not filled with water.

"People used to say in olden days that no boat returns after having once entered the 'black waters' of the ocean.

"All trouble and botheration come to an end when the 'I' dies. You may indulge in thousands of reasonings, but still the 'I' doesn't disappear. For people like you and me, it is good to have the feeling, 'I am a lover of God.'

• "The Saguna Brahman is meant for the bhaktas. In other words, a bhakta believes that God has attributes and reveals Himself to men as a Person, assuming forms. It is He who listens to our prayers. The prayers that you utter are directed to Him alone. You are bhaktas, not jnanis or Vedantists. It doesn't matter whether you accept God with form or not. It is enough to feel that God is a Person who listens to our prayers, who creates, preserves, and destroys the universe, and who is endowed with infinite power.

"It is easier to attain God by following the path of devotion."

BRAHMO DEVOTEE : "Sir, is it possible for one to see God ? If so, why can't we see Him ?"

MASTER : "Yes, He can surely be seen. One can see His forms, and His formless aspect as well. How can I explain that to you ?"

BRAHMO DEVOTEE : "What are the means by which one can see God ?"

MASTER : "Can you weep for Him with intense longing of heart ? Men shed a jugful of tears for the sake of their children, for their wives, or for money. But who weeps for God ? So long as the child remains engrossed with its toys, the mother looks after her cooking and other household duties. But when the child no longer relishes the toys, it throws them aside and yells for its mother. Then the mother takes the rice-pot down from the hearth, runs in haste, and takes the child in her arms."

BRAHMO DEVOTEE : "Sir, why are there so many different opinions about the nature of God ? Some say that God has form, while others say that He is formless. Again, those who speak of God with form tell us about His different forms. Why all this controversy ?"

MASTER : "A devotee thinks of God as he sees Him. In reality there is no confusion about God. God explains all this to the devotee if the devotee only realizes Him somehow. You haven't set your foot in that direction. How can you expect to know all about God ?

"Listen to a story. Once a man entered a wood and saw a small animal on a tree. He came back and told another man that he had seen a creature of ■ beautiful red colour on a certain tree. The second man replied : 'When I went into the wood, I also saw that animal. But why do you call it red ? It is green.' Another man who was present contradicted them both and insisted that it was yellow. Presently others arrived and contended that it was grey, violet, blue, and so forth and so on. At last they started quarrelling among themselves. To settle the dispute they all went to the tree. They saw a man sitting under it. On being asked, he replied : 'Yes, I live under this tree and I know the animal very well. All your descriptions are true. Sometimes it appears red, sometimes yellow, and at other times blue, violet, grey, and so forth. It is a chameleon. And sometimes it has no colour at all. Now it has a colour, and now it has none.'

"In like manner, one who constantly thinks of God can know His real nature ; he alone knows that God reveals Himself to seekers in various forms and aspects. God has attributes ; then again He has none. Only the man who lives under the tree knows that the chameleon can appear in various



colours, and he knows, further, that the animal at times has no colour at all. It is the others who suffer from the agony of futile argument.

"Kabir used to say, 'The formless Absolute is my Father, and God with form is my Mother.'

"God reveals Himself in the form which His devotee loves most. His love for the devotee knows no bounds. It is written in the Purana that God assumed the form of Rama for His heroic devotee, Hanuman.

"The forms and aspects of God disappear when one discriminates in accordance with the Vedanta philosophy. The ultimate conclusion of such discrimination is that Brahman alone is real and this world of names and forms illusory. It is possible for a man to see the forms of God, or to think of Him as a Person, only so long as he is conscious that he is a devotee. From the standpoint of discrimination this 'ego of a devotee' keeps him a little away from God.

"Do you know why images of Krishna or Kali are three and a half cubits high? Because of distance. Again, on account of distance the sun appears to be small. But if you go near it you will find the sun so big that you won't be able to comprehend it. Why have images of Krishna and Kali a dark-blue colour? That too is on account of distance, like the water of a lake, which appears green, blue, or black from a distance. Go near, take the water in the palm of your hand, and you will find that it has no colour. The sky also appears blue from a distance. Go near and you will see that it has no colour at all.

"Therefore I say that in the light of Vedantic reasoning Brahman has no attributes. The real nature of Brahman cannot be described. But so long as your individuality is real, the world also is real, and equally real are the different forms of God and the feeling that God is a Person.

"Yours is the path of bhakti. That is very good; it is an easy path. Who can fully know the infinite God? and what need is there of knowing the Infinite? Having attained this rare human birth, my supreme need is to develop love for the Lotus Feet of God.

"If a jug of water is enough to remove my thirst, why should I measure the quantity of water in a lake? I become drunk on even half a bottle of wine —what is the use of my calculating the quantity of liquor in the tavern? What need is there of knowing the Infinite?

"The various states of mind of the Brahmajnani are described in the Vedas. The path of knowledge is extremely difficult. One cannot obtain jnana if one has the least trace of worldliness and the slightest attachment to 'woman and gold'. This is not the path for the Kaliyuga.

"The Vedas speak of seven planes where the mind dwells. When the mind is immersed in worldliness it dwells in the three lower planes—at the navel, the organ of generation, and the organ of evacuation. In that state the mind loses all its higher visions—it broods only on 'woman and gold'. The fourth plane of the mind is at the heart. When the mind dwells there, one has the first glimpse of spiritual consciousness. One sees light all around. Such a man, perceiving the divine light, becomes speechless with wonder and

says: 'Ah ! What is this ? What is this ?' His mind does not go downward to the objects of the world.

"The fifth plane of the mind is at the throat. When the mind reaches this, the aspirant becomes free from all ignorance and illusion. He does not enjoy talking or hearing about anything but God. If people talk about worldly things, he leaves the place at once.

"The sixth plane is at the forehead. When the mind reaches it, the aspirant sees the form of God day and night. But even then a little trace of ego remains. At the sight of that incomparable beauty of God's form, one becomes intoxicated and rushes forth to touch and embrace it. But one doesn't succeed. It is like the light inside a lantern. One feels as if one could touch the light, but one cannot on account of the pane of glass.

"In the top of the head is the seventh plane. When the mind rises there, one goes into samadhi. Then the Brahmajnani directly perceives Brahman. But in that state his body does not last many days. He remains unconscious of the outer world. If milk is poured into his mouth, it runs out. Dwelling on this plane of consciousness, he gives up his body in twenty-one days. That is the condition of the Brahmajnani. But yours is the path of devotion. That is a very good and easy path.

"Once a man said to me, 'Sir, can you teach me quickly the thing you call samadhi ?' (All laugh.)

"After a man has attained samadhi all his actions drop away. All devotional activities, such as worship, japa, and the like, as well as all worldly duties, cease to exist for such a person. At the beginning there is much ado about work. As a man makes progress toward God, the outer display of his work becomes less and less—so much so that he cannot even sing the name and glories of God. (To Shivanath) As long as you were not here at the meeting, people talked a great deal about you and discussed your virtues. But no sooner did you arrive here than all that stopped. Now the very sight of you makes everyone happy. People now simply say, 'Ah ! Here is Shivanath Babu.' All other talk about you has stopped.

"After attaining samadhi, I once went to the Ganges to perform tarpan. But as I took water in the palm of my hand, it trickled down through my fingers. Weeping, I said to Haladhari, 'Cousin, what is this ?' Haladhari replied, 'It is called galitahasta⁶ in the holy books.' After the vision of God, such duties as the performance of tarpan drop away.

"In the kirtan the devotee first sings, 'Nitai amar mata hati.'⁷ As the devotional mood deepens, he simply sings, 'Hati ! Hati !' Next, all he can sing is 'Hati'. And last of all he simply sings, 'Ha !' and goes into samadhi. The man who has been singing all the while then becomes speechless.

"Again, at a feast given to the brahmins one at first hears much noise of talking. When the guests sit on the floor with leaf-plates in front of them, much of the noise ceases. Then one hears only the cry, 'Bring some luchi !' As they partake of the luchi and other dishes, three quarters of the noise subsides.

⁶ Literally, "inert and benumbed hand".

⁷ "My Nitai dances like a mad elephant."

When the curd, the last course, appears, one hears only the sound 'soop, soop' as the guests eat the curd with their fingers. Then there is practically no noise. Afterwards all retire to sleep, and absolute silence reigns.

"Therefore I say, at the beginning of religious life a man makes much ado about work, but as his mind dives deeper into God, he becomes less active. Last of all comes the renunciation of work, followed by samadhi."

"Generally the body does not remain alive after the attainment of samadhi. The only exceptions are such sages as Narada, who keep their bodies alive in order to bring spiritual light to others. It is also true of Divine Incarnations, like Chaitanya. After the well is dug, one generally throws away the spade and the basket. But some keep them in order to help their neighbours. The great souls who retain their bodies after samadhi feel compassion for the suffering of others. They are not so selfish as to be satisfied with their own illumination. You are well aware of the nature of selfish people. If you ask them to spit at a particular place, they won't, lest it should do you good. If you ask them to bring a sweetmeat worth a cent from the store, they will perhaps lick it on the way back. (*All laugh.*)

"But the manifestations of Divine Power are different in different beings. Ordinary souls are afraid to teach others. A piece of worthless timber may itself somehow float across the water, but it sinks even under the weight of a bird. Sages like Narada are like a heavy log of wood, which not only floats on the water but also can carry men, cows, and even elephants."

(*To Shivanath and the other Brahmo devotees*) "Can you tell me why you dwell so much on the powers and glories of God? I asked the same thing of Keshab Sen. One day Keshab and his party came to the temple garden at Dakshineswar. I told them I wanted to hear how they lectured. A meeting was arranged in the paved courtyard above the bathing-ghat on the Ganges, where Keshab gave a talk. He spoke very well. I went into a trance. After the lecture I said to Keshab, 'Why do you so often say such things as: "O God, what beautiful flowers Thou hast made! O God, thou hast created the heavens, the stars, and the ocean!" and so on?' Those who love splendour themselves are fond of dwelling on God's splendour."

"Once a thief stole the jewels from the images in the temple of Radhakanta. Mathur Babu entered the temple and said to the Deity: 'What a shame, O God! You couldn't save Your own ornaments.' 'The idea!' I said to Mathur. 'Does He who has Lakshmi for His handmaid and attendant ever lack any splendour? Those jewels may be precious to you, but to God they are no better than lumps of clay. Shame on you! You shouldn't have spoken so meanly. What riches can you give to God to magnify His glory?'

"Therefore I say, a man seeks the person in whom he finds joy. What need has he to ask where that person lives, the number of his houses, gardens, relatives, and servants, or the amount of his wealth? I forgot everything when I see Narendra. Never, even unwittingly, have I asked him where he lived, what his father's profession was, or the number of his brothers."

"Dive deep in the sweetness of God's Bliss. What need have we of His infinite creation and unlimited glory?"

• The Master sang :

Dive deep, O mind, dive deep in the Ocean of God's Beauty;
 If you descend to the uttermost depths,
 There you will find the gem of Love.

Go seek, O mind, go seek Vrindavan in your heart,
 Where with His loving devotees
 Sri Krishna sports eternally.

Light up, O mind, light up true wisdom's shining lamp,
 And let it burn with steady flame,
 Unceasingly within your heart.

Who is it that steers your boat across the solid earth ?
 It is your guru, says Kubir :
 Meditate on his holy feet.

Sri Ramakrishna continued : "It is also true that after the vision of God the devotee desires to witness His lila. After the destruction of Ravana at Rama's hands, Nikasha, Ravana's mother, began to run away for fear of her life. Lakshmana said to Rama : 'Revered Brother, please explain this strange thing to me. This Nikasha is an old woman who has suffered a great deal from the loss of her many sons, and yet she is so afraid of losing her own life that she is taking to her heels !' Rama bade her come near, gave her assurance of safety, and asked her why she was running away. Nikasha answered : 'O Rama, I am able to witness all this lila of Yours because I am still alive. I want to live longer so that I may see the many more things You will do on this earth.' (All laugh.)

(To Shivanath) "I like to see you. How can I live unless I see pure-souled devotees ? I feel as if they had been my friends in a former incarnation."

A BRAHMO DEVOTEE : "Sir, do you believe in the reincarnation of the soul ?"

MASTER : "Yes, they say there is something like that. How can we understand the ways of God through our small intellects ? Many people have spoken about reincarnation ; therefore I cannot disbelieve it. As Bhishma lay dying on his bed of arrows, the Pandava brothers and Krishna stood around him. They saw tears flowing from the eyes of the great hero. Arjuna said to Krishna : 'Friend, how surprising it is ! Even such a man as our grandsire Bhishma—truthful, self-restrained, supremely wise, and one of the eight Vasus—weeps, through maya, at the hour of death.' Sri Krishna asked Bishma about it. Bhishma replied : 'O Krishna, You know very well that this is not the cause of my grief. I am thinking that there is no end to the Pandavas' sufferings, though God Himself is their charioteer.' A thought like this makes me feel that I have understood nothing of the ways of God, and so I weep."

It was about half past eight when the evening worship began in the prayer hall. Soon the moon rose in the autumn sky and flooded the trees and

⁷ Krishna, an Incarnation of God, was Arjuna's charioteer.

creepers of the garden with its light. After prayer the devotees began to sing. Sri Ramakrishna was dancing, intoxicated with love of God. The Brahmo devotees danced around him to the accompaniment of drums and cymbals. All appeared to be in a very joyous mood. The place echoed and re-echoed with God's holy name.

When the music had stopped, Sri Ramakrishna prostrated himself on the ground and, making salutations to the Divine Mother again and again, said : "Bhagavata—Bhakta—Bhagavan ! My salutations at the feet of the jnanis ! My salutations at the feet of the bhaktas ! I salute the bhaktas who believe in God with form, and I salute the bhaktas who believe in God without form. I salute the knowers of Brahman of olden times. And my salutations at the feet of the modern knowers of Brahman of the Brahmo Samaj ! "

Then the Master and the devotees enjoyed a supper of delicious dishes, which Benimadhav, their host, had provided.

Wednesday, November 15, 1882

Sri Ramakrishna, accompanied by Rakhal and several other devotees, came to Calcutta in a carriage and called for M. at the school where he was teaching. Then they all set out for the Maidan. Sri Ramakrishna wanted to see the Wilson Circus. As the carriage rolled along the crowded Chitpore Road, his joy was very great. Like a little child he leaned first out of one side of the carriage and then out of the other, talking to himself as if addressing the passers-by. To M. he said : "I find the attention of the people fixed on earthly things. They are all rushing about for the sake of their stomachs. No one is thinking of God."

They arrived at the circus. Tickets for the cheapest seats were purchased. The devotees took the Master to a high gallery, and they all sat on a bench. He said joyfully : "Ha ! This is a good place. I can see the show well from here." There were exhibitions of various feats. A horse raced around a circular track over which large iron rings were hung at intervals. The circus rider, an Englishwoman, stood on one foot on the horse's back, and as the horse passed under the rings, she jumped through them, always alighting on one foot on the horse's back. The horse raced around the entire circle, and the woman never missed the horse or lost her balance.

When the circus was over, the Master and the devotees stood outside in the field, near the carriage. Since it was a cold night he covered his body with his green shawl.

Sri Ramakrishna said to M. : "Did you see how that Englishwoman stood on one foot on her horse, while it ran like lightning ? How difficult a feat that must be ! She must have practised a long time. The slightest carelessness and she would break her arms or legs ; she might even be killed. One faces the same difficulty leading the life of a householder. A few succeed in it through the grace of God and as a result of their spiritual practice. But most people fail. Entering the world, they become more and more involved in it ; they drown in worldliness and suffer the agonies of death. A few only,

like Janaka, have succeeded, through the power of their austerity, in leading the spiritual life as householders. Therefore spiritual practice is extremely necessary ; otherwise one cannot rightly live in the world."

The Master got into the carriage with the devotees and went to Balaram Bose's house. He was taken with his companions to the second floor. It was evening and the lamps were lighted. The Master described the feats he had seen at the circus. Gradually other devotees gathered, and soon he was engaged in spiritual talk with them.

The conversation turned to the caste-system. Sri Ramakrishna said : " The caste-system can be removed by one means only, and that is the love of God. Lovers of God do not belong to any caste. The mind, body, and soul of a man become purified through divine love. Chaitanya and Nityananda scattered the name of Hari to everyone, including the pariah, and embraced them all. A brahmin without this love is no longer a brahmin. And a pariah with the love of God is no longer a pariah. Through bhakti an untouchable becomes pure and elevated."

Speaking of householders entangled in worldliness, the Master said : " They are like the silk-worm. They can come out of the cocoon of their worldly life if they wish. But they can't bear to ; for they themselves have built the cocoon with great love and care. So they die there. Or they are like the fish in a trap. They can come out of it by the way they entered, but they sport inside the trap with other fish and hear the sweet sound of the murmuring water and forget everything else. They don't even make an effort to free themselves from the trap. The lisping of children is the murmur of the water and the other fish are relatives and friends. Only one or two make good their escape by running away. They are the liberated souls."

The Master then sang :

When such delusion veils the world, through Mahamaya's spell,
That Brahma is bereft of sense,
And Vishnu loses consciousness,
What hope is left for men ?

The narrow channel first is made, and there the trap is set ;
But open though the passage lies,
The fish, once safely through the gate,
Do not come out again.

The silk-worm patiently prepares its closely spun cocoon :
Yet even though a way leads forth,
Encased within its own cocoon,
The worm remains to die.

The Master continued : " Man may be likened to grain. He has fallen between the millstones and is about to be crushed. Only the few grains that stay near the peg escape. Therefore men should take refuge at the peg, that is to say, in God. Call on Him. Sing His name. Then you will be free. Otherwise you will be crushed by the King of Death."

The Master sang again :

Mother ! Mother ! My boat is sinking, here in the ocean of this world :
 Fiercely the hurricane of delusion rages on every side !
 Clumsy is my helmsman, the mind ; stubborn my six oarsmen, the passions ;
 Into a pitiless wind I sailed my boat, and now it is sinking !
 Split is the rudder of devotion ; tattered is the sail of faith ;
 Into my boat the waters are pouring ! Tell me, what shall I do ?
 For with my failing eyes, alas ! nothing but darkness do I see.
 Here in the waves I will swim,
 O Mother, and cling to the raft of Thy name !

Mr. Viswas had been sitting in the room a long time ; he now left. He had once been wealthy but had squandered everything in an immoral life. Finally he had become indifferent to his wife and children. Referring to Mr. Viswas, the Master said : "He is an unfortunate wretch. A householder has his duties to discharge, his debts to pay : his debt to the gods, his debt to his ancestors, his debt to the rishis, and his debt to wife and children. If a wife is chaste, then her husband should support her ; he should also bring up their children until they are of age. Only a monk must not save ; the bird and the monk do not provide for the morrow. But even a bird provides when it has young. It brings food in its bill for its chicks."

BALARAM : "Mr. Viswas now wants to cultivate the company of holy people."

MASTER (*with a smile*) : "A monk's kamandalu goes to the four principal holy places¹ with him, but it still tastes bitter. Likewise, it is said that the Malaya breeze turns all trees into sandal wood. But there are a few exceptions, such as the cotton-tree, the aswattha, and the hog plum.

"Some frequent the company of holy men in order to smoke hemp. Many monks smoke it, and these householders stay with them, prepare the hemp, and partake of the prasad."

Thursday, November 16, 1882

The Master had come to Calcutta. In the evening he went to the house of Rajmohan, a member of the Brahmo Samaj, where Narendra and some of his young friends used to meet and worship according to the Brahmo ceremonies. Sri Ramakrishna wanted to see their worship. He was accompanied by M. and a few other devotees.

The Master was very happy to see Narendra and expressed a desire to watch the young men at their worship. Narendra sang and then the worship began. One of the young men conducted it. He prayed, "O Lord, may we give up everything and be absorbed in Thee !" Possibly the youth was inspired by the Master's presence and so talked of utter renunciation. Sri Ramakrishna remarked in a whisper, "Much likelihood there is of that !"

Rajmohan served the Master with refreshments.

¹ At the four cardinal points of India, namely, Kedarnath in the Himalayas, Dwarka in the west, Rameswar in the south, and Puri in the east.

Sunday, November 19, 1882

It was the auspicious occasion of the Jagaddhatri Puja, the festival of the Divine Mother. Sri Ramakrishna was invited to Surendra's house in Calcutta ; but first he went to the house of Manomohan in the neighbourhood.

The Master was seated in Manomohan's parlour.. He said : "God very much relishes the bhakti of the poor and the lowly, just as the cow relishes fodder mixed with oil-cake. King Duryodhana showed Krishna the splendour of his wealth and riches, but Krishna accepted the hospitality of the poor Vidura. God is fond of His devotees. He runs after the devotee as the cow after the calf."

The Master sang :

And, for that love, the mighty yogis practise yoga from age to age ;
When love awakes, the Lord, like a magnet, draws to Him the soul.

Then he said : "Chaitanya used to shed tears of joy at the very mention of Krishna's name. God alone is the real Substance ; all else is illusory. Man can realize God if he wants to, but he madly craves the enjoyment of 'woman and gold'. The snake has a precious stone¹ in its head, but it is perfectly satisfied to eat a mere frog.

"Bhakti is the one essential thing. Who can ever know God through reasoning ? I want love of God. What do I care about knowing His infinite glories ? One bottle of wine makes me drunk. What do I care about knowing how many gallons there are in the grog-shop ? One jar of water is enough to quench my thirst. I don't need to know the amount of water there is on earth."

Sri Ramakrishna arrived at Surendra's house. Many devotees had assembled there, including Surendra's elder brother, who was a judge.

MASTER (*to Surendra's brother*) : "You are a judge. That is very good. But remember, everything happens through God's power. It is He who has given you your high position ; that is how you became a judge. People think it is they who are great. The water from the roof flows through a spout that is shaped like a lion's head. It looks as if the lion were bringing the water out through its mouth. But look at the source of the water ! A cloud gathers in the sky and rain falls on the roof ; then the water flows through the pipe and at last comes out through the spout."

SURENDRA'S BROTHER : "The Brahmo Samaj preaches the freedom of women and the abolition of the caste-system. What do you think about these matters ?"

MASTER : "Men feel that way when they are just beginning to develop spiritual yearning. A storm raises clouds of dust, and one cannot distinguish between the different trees—the mango, the hog plum, and the tamarind. But after the storm blows over, one sees clearly. After the first storm of divine passion is quelled, one gradually understands that God alone is the Highest Good, the Eternal Substance, and that all else is transitory. One cannot grasp

¹A folk belief in Bengal.

this without tapasya and the company of holy men. What is the use of merely reciting the written parts for the drum? It is very difficult to put them into practice on the instrument. What can be accomplished by a mere lecture? It is austerity that is necessary. By that alone can one comprehend.

"You asked about caste distinctions. There is only one way to remove them, and that is by love of God. Lovers of God have no caste. Through this divine love the untouchable becomes pure, the pariah no longer remains a pariah. Chaitanya embraced all, including the pariahs."

"The members of the Brahmo Samaj sing the name of Hari. That is very good. Through earnest prayer one receives the grace of God and realizes Him. God can be realized by means of all paths. The same God is invoked by different names."

SURENDRA'S BROTHER : "Sir, what do you think of Theosophy?"

MASTER : "I have heard that man can acquire superhuman powers through it and perform miracles. I saw a man who had brought a ghost under control. The ghost used to procure various things for his master. What shall I do with superhuman powers? Can one realize God through them? If God is not realized then everything becomes false."

November 1882

It was about four o'clock in the afternoon when Sri Ramakrishna arrived in Calcutta to attend the annual festival of the Brahmo Samaj, which was to be celebrated at Manilal Mallick's house. Besides M. and other devotees of the Master, Vijay Goswami and a number of Brahmos were present. Elaborate arrangements had been made to make the occasion a success. Vijay was to conduct the worship.

The kathak recited the life of Prahlada from the Purana. Its substance was as follows: Hiranyakasipu, Prahlada's father, was king of the demons. He bore great malice toward God and put his own son through endless tortures for leading a religious life. Afflicted by his father, Prahlada prayed to God, "O God, please give my father holy inclinations."

At these words the Master wept. He went into an ecstatic mood. Afterwards he began to talk to the devotees.

MASTER : "Bhakti is the only essential thing. One obtains love of God by constantly chanting His name and singing His glories. Ah! What a devotee Shivanath is! He is soaked in the love of God, like a cheese-cake in syrup."

"One should not think, 'My religion alone is the right path and other religions are false.' God can be realized by means of all paths. It is enough to have sincere yearning for God. Infinite are the paths and infinite the opinions."

"Let me tell you one thing. God can be seen. The Vedas say that God is beyond mind and speech. The meaning of this is that God is unknown to the mind attached to worldly objects. Vaishnavcharan¹⁹ used to say, 'God is known by the mind and intellect that are pure.' Therefore it is necessary to seek the company of holy men, practise prayer, and listen to the instruction of

¹⁹ A noted devotee of the Vaishnava sect and an admirer of Sri Ramakrishna.

the guru. These purify the mind. Then one sees God. Dirt can be removed from water by a purifying agent. Then one sees one's reflection in it. One cannot see one's face in a mirror if the mirror is covered with dirt.

"After the purification of the heart one obtains divine love. Then one sees God, through His grace. One can teach others if one receives that command from God after seeing Him. Before that one should not 'lecture'. There is a song that says :

You have set up no image here,
Within the shrine, O fool !
Blowing the conch, you simply make
Confusion worse confounded.

"You should first cleanse the shrine of your heart. Then you should install the Deity and arrange worship. As yet nothing has been done. What can you achieve by blowing the conch-shell¹¹ and simply making a loud noise ?"

Vijay sat on a raised stool and conducted the worship according to the rules of the Brahmo Samaj. Afterwards he sat by the Master.

MASTER (to Vijay) : "Will you tell me one thing ? Why did you harp so much on sin ? By repeating a hundred times, 'I am a sinner', one verily becomes a sinner. One should have such faith as to be able to say, 'What ? I have taken the name of God ; how can I be a sinner ?' God is our Father and Mother. Tell Him, 'O Lord, I have committed sins, but I won't repeat them.' Chant His name and purify your body and mind. Purify your tongue by singing God's holy name."

December 1882

In the afternoon Sri Ramakrishna was seated on the west porch of his room in the temple garden at Dakshineswar. Among others, Baburam, Rambadal, and M. were present. These three were going to spend the night with the Master. M. intended to stay the following day also, for he was having his Christmas holidays. Baburam had only recently begun to visit the Master.

MASTER (to the devotees) : "A man becomes liberated even in this life when he knows that God is the Doer of all things. Once Keshab came here with Sambhu Mallick. I said to him, 'Not even a leaf moves except by the will of God.' Where is man's free will ? All are under the will of God. Nangta was a man of great knowledge, yet even he was about to drown himself in the Ganges. He stayed here eleven months. At one time he suffered from stomach trouble. The excruciating pain made him lose control over himself, and he wanted to drown himself in the river. There was a long shoal near the bathing-ghat. However far he went into the river, he couldn't find water above his knees. Then he understood everything¹² and came back. At one time I was very ill and was about to cut my throat with a knife. Therefore I say : 'O Mother, I am the machine and Thou art the Operator ; I am the chariot and

¹¹ The conch-shell is blown during the temple service.

¹² He realized that man is not free even to kill himself, that everything depends on the will of the Divine Mother.

Thou art the Driver. I move as Thou movest me ; I do as Thou makest me do."

The devotees sang kirtan in the Master's room :

Dwell, O Lord, O Lover of bhakti,
In the Vrindavan of my heart,
And my devotion unto Thee
Will be Thy Radha, dearly loved ;
My body will be Nanda's home,
My tenderness will be Yasoda,
My longing for deliverance
Will be Thy gentle gopi maids.

Lift the Govardhan of my sin
And slay my six unyielding passions.
Fierce as the demons sent by Kamsa !
Sweetly play the flute¹¹ of Thy grace,
Charming the milch cow of my mind :
Abide in the pasture of my soul.

Dwell by the Jamuna of my yearning,
Under the banyan of my hope,
For ever gracious to Thy servant ;
And, if naught but the cowherds' love
Can hold Thee in Vrindavan's vale,
Then, Lord, let Dasarathi, too,
Become Thy cowherd and Thy slave.

Again they sang :

Sing, O bird that nestles deep within my heart !
Sing, O bird that sits on the Kalpa-Tree of Brahman !
Sing God's everlasting praise.
Taste, O bird, of the four fruits of the Kalpa-Tree,
Dharma, artha, kama, moksha.
Sing, O bird, "He alone is the Comfort of my soul !"
Sing, O bird, "He alone is my life's enduring Joy !"
O thou wondrous bird of my life,
Sing aloud in my heart ! Unceasingly sing, O bird !
Sing for evermore, even as the thirsty chatak
Sings for the raindrop from the cloud.

A devotee from Nandanbagan entered the room with his friends. The Master looked at him and said, "Everything inside him can be seen through his eyes, as one sees the objects in a room through a glass door." This devotee and his brothers always celebrated the anniversary of the Brahmo Samaj at their house in Nandanbagan. Sri Ramakrishna had taken part in these festivals.

The evening worship began in the temples. The Master was seated on the small couch in his room, absorbed in meditation. He went into an ecstatic mood and said a little later : "Mother, please draw him to Thee. He is so modest and humble ! He has been visiting Thee." Was the Master referring to Baburam, who later became one of his foremost disciples ?

¹¹ A reference to Sri Krishna's pastoral life.



• The Master explained the different kinds of samadhi to the devotees. The conversation then turned to the joy and suffering of life. Why did God create so much suffering?

M: "Once Vidyasagar said in a mood of pique : 'What is the use of calling on God? Just think of this incident : At one time Chenghiz Khan plundered a country and imprisoned many people. The number of prisoners rose to about a hundred thousand. The commander of his army said to him : "Your Majesty, who will feed them? It is risky to keep them with us. It will be equally dangerous to release them. What shall I do?" Chenghiz Khan said : "That's true. What can be done? Well, have them killed." The order was accordingly given to cut them to pieces. Now, God saw this slaughter, didn't He? But He didn't stop it in any way. Therefore I don't need God, whether He exists or not. I don't derive any good from Him.'"

MASTER : "Is it possible to understand God's action and His motive? He creates, He preserves, and He destroys. Can we ever understand why He destroys? I say to the Divine Mother : 'O Mother, I do not need to understand. Please give me love for Thy Lotus Feet.' The aim of human life is to attain bhakti. As for other things, the Mother knows best. I have come to the garden to eat mangoes. What is the use of my calculating the number of trees, branches, and leaves? I only eat the mangoes; I don't need to know the number of trees and leaves."

Baburam, M., and Ramdayal slept that night on the floor of the Master's room.

It was an early hour of the morning, about two or three o'clock. The room was dark. Sri Ramakrishna was seated on his bed and now and then conversed with the devotees.

MASTER : "Remember that daya, compassion, and maya, attachment, are two different things. Attachment means the feeling of 'my-ness' toward one's relatives. It is the love one feels for one's parents, one's brother, one's sister, one's wife and children. Compassion is the love one feels for all beings of the world. It is an attitude of equality. If you see anywhere an instance of compassion, as in Vidyasagar, know that it is due to the grace of God. Through compassion one serves all beings. Maya also comes from God. Through maya God makes one serve one's relatives. But one thing should be remembered : maya keeps us in ignorance and entangles us in the world, whereas daya makes our hearts pure and gradually unites our bonds."

"God cannot be realized without purity of heart. One receives the grace of God by subduing the passions—lust, anger, and greed. Then one sees God. I tried many things in order to conquer lust.

"When I was ten or eleven years old and lived at Kamarpukur, I first experienced samadhi. As I was passing through a paddy-field, I saw something and was overwhelmed. There are certain characteristics of God-vision. One sees light, feels joy, and experiences the upsurge of a great current in one's chest, like the bursting of a rocket."

The next day Baburam and Ramdayal returned to Calcutta. M. spent the day and the night with the Master.

December 1882

It was afternoon. The Master was sitting in his room at Dakshineswar with M. and one or two other devotees. Several Marwari devotees arrived and saluted the Master. They requested Sri Ramakrishna to give them spiritual instruction. He smiled.

MASTER (to the Marwari devotees) : " You see, the feeling of ' I ' and ' mine ' is the result of ignorance. But to say, ' O God, Thou art the Doer ; all these belong to Thee ' is the sign of Knowledge. How can you say such a thing as ' mine ' ? The superintendent of the garden says, ' This is my garden.' But if he is dismissed because of some misconduct, then he does not have the courage to take away even such a worthless thing as his mango-wood box. Anger and lust cannot be destroyed. Turn them toward God. If you must feel desire and temptation, then desire to realize God, feel tempted by Him. Discriminate and turn the passions away from worldly objects. When the elephant is about to devour a plantain-tree in someone's garden, the mahut strikes it with his iron-tipped goad.

" You are merchants. You know how to improve your business gradually. Some of you start with a castor-oil factory. After making some money at that, you open a cloth shop. In the same way, one makes progress toward God. It may be that you go into solitude, now and then, and devote more time to prayer.

" But you must remember that nothing can be achieved except in its proper time. Some persons must pass through many experiences and perform many worldly duties before they can turn their attention to God ; so they have to wait a long time. If an abscess is lanced before it is soft, the result is not good ; the surgeon makes the opening when it is soft and has come to a head. Once a child said to its mother : ' Mother, I am going to sleep now. Please wake me up when I feel the call of nature.' ' My child,' said the mother, ' when it is time for that, you will wake up yourself. I shan't have to wake you.' "

The Marwari devotees generally brought offerings of fruit, candy, and other sweets for the Master. But Sri Ramakrishna could hardly eat them. He would say : " They earn their money by falsehood. I can't eat their offerings." He said to the Marwaris : " You see, one can't strictly adhere to truth in business. There are ups and downs in business. Nanak once said, ' I was about to eat the food of unholy people, when I found it stained with blood.' A man should offer only pure things to holy men. He shouldn't give them food earned by dishonest means. God is realized by following the path of truth. One should always chant His name. Even while one is performing one's duties, the mind should be left with God. Suppose I have a carbuncle on my back. I perform my duties, but the mind is drawn to the carbuncle. It is good to repeat the name of Rama. ' The same Rama who was the son of King Dasaratha has created this world. Again, as Spirit, He pervades all beings. He is very near us ; He is both within and without.' "

VII

THE MASTER AND VIJAY GOSWAMI

Thursday, December 14, 1882

23 - 11 - 45.

IT WAS AFTERNOON. Sri Ramakrishna was sitting on his bed after a short noonday rest. Vijay, Balaram, M., and a few other devotees were sitting on the floor with their faces toward the Master. They could see the sacred river Ganges through the door. Since it was winter all were wrapped up in warm clothes. Vijay had been suffering from colic and had brought some medicine with him.

Vijay was a paid preacher in the Sadharan Brahmo Samaj, but there were many things about which he could not agree with the Samaj authorities. He came from a very noble family of Bengal noted for its piety and other spiritual qualities. Advaita Goswami, one of his remote ancestors, had been an intimate companion of Sri Chaitanya. Thus the blood of a great lover of God flowed in Vijay's veins. As an adherent of the Brahmo Samaj, Vijay no doubt meditated on the formless Brahman; but his innate love of God, inherited from his distinguished ancestors, had merely been waiting for the proper time to manifest itself in all its sweetness. Thus Vijay was irresistibly attracted by the God-intoxicated state of Sri Ramakrishna and often sought his company. He would listen to the Master's words with great respect, and they would dance together in an ecstasy of divine love.

It was a week-day. Generally devotees came to the Master in large numbers on Sundays; hence those who wanted to have intimate talks with him visited him on week-days.

A boy named Vishnu, living in Ariadaha, had recently committed suicide by cutting his throat with a razor. The talk turned to him.

MASTER : "I felt very badly when I heard of the boy's passing away. He was a pupil in a school and he used to come here. He would often say to me that he couldn't enjoy worldly life. He had lived with some relatives in the western provinces and at that time used to meditate in solitude, in the meadows, hills, and forests. He told me he had visions of many divine forms."

"Perhaps this was his last birth. He must have finished most of his duties in his previous birth. The little that had been left undone was perhaps finished in this one."

"One must admit the existence of tendencies inherited from previous births. There is a story about a man who practised the sava-sadhana.¹ He worshipped the Divine Mother in a deep forest. First he saw many terrible visions. Finally a tiger attacked and killed him. Another man, happening to pass and seeing the approach of the tiger, had climbed a tree. Afterwards he got down and found all the arrangements for worship at hand. He performed some purifying ceremonies, and seated himself on the corpse. No sooner had he done a little japa than the Divine Mother appeared before him and said : 'My child, I am very much pleased with you. Accept a boon from Me.' He bowed low at the Lotus Feet of the Goddess and said : 'May I ask You one question, Mother ? I am speechless with amazement at Your action. The other man worked so hard to get the ingredients for Your worship and tried to propitiate You for such a long time, but You didn't condescend to show him Your favour. And I, who don't know anything of worship, who have done nothing, who have neither devotion nor knowledge nor love, and who haven't practised any austerities, am receiving so much of Your grace.' The Divine Mother said with a laugh : 'My child, you don't remember your previous births. For many births you tried to propitiate Me through austerities. As a result of those austerities all these things have come to hand, and you have been blessed with My vision. Now ask Me your boon.'

A DEVOTEE : "I am frightened to hear of the suicide."

MASTER : "Suicide is a heinous sin, undoubtedly. A man who kills himself must return again and again to this world and suffer its agony.

"But I don't call it suicide if a person leaves his body after having the vision of God. There is no harm in giving up one's body that way. After attaining Knowledge some people give up their bodies. After the gold image has been cast in the clay mould, you may either preserve the mould or break it.

"Many years ago a young man of about twenty used to come to the temple garden from Baranagore ; his name was Gopal Sen. In my presence he used to experience such intense ecstasy that Hriday had to support him for fear he might fall to the ground and break his limbs. That young man touched my feet one day and said : 'Sir, I shall not be able to see you any more. Let me bid you good-bye.' A few days later I learnt that he had given up his body.

"It is said that there are four classes of human beings : the bound, those aspiring after liberation, the liberated, and the ever-perfect.

"This world is like a fishing-net. Men are the fish, and God, whose maya has created this world, is the fisherman. When the fish are entangled in the net, some of them try to tear through its meshes in order to get their liberation. They are like the men striving after liberation. But by no means all of them escape. Only a few jump out of the net with a loud splash, and then people say, 'Ah ! There goes a big one !' In like manner, three or four men attain liberation. Again, some fish are so careful by nature that they are never caught in the net ; some beings of the ever-perfect class, like Narada, are never entangled in the meshes of worldliness. Most of the fish are

¹ A religious practice prescribed by the Tantra, in which the aspirant uses also a sava, or corpse, as his seat for meditation.

trapped ; but they are not conscious of the net and of their imminent death. No sooner are they entangled than they run headlong, net and all, trying to hide themselves in the mud. They don't make the least effort to get free. On the contrary, they go deeper and deeper into the mud. These fish are like the bound men. They are still inside the net, but they think they are quite safe there. A bound creature is immersed in worldliness, in 'woman and gold', having gone deep into the mire of degradation. But still he believes he is quite happy and secure. The liberated, and the seekers after liberation, look on the world as a deep well. They do not enjoy it. Therefore, after the attainment of Knowledge, the realization of God, some give up their bodies. But such a thing is rare indeed.

"The bound creatures, entangled in worldliness, will not come to their senses at all. They suffer so much misery and agony, they face so many dangers, and yet they will not wake up.

"The camel loves to eat thorny bushes. The more it eats the thorns, the more the blood gushes from its mouth. Still it must eat thorny plants and will never give them up. The man of worldly nature suffers so much sorrow and affliction, but he forgets it all in a few days and begins his old life over again. Suppose a man has lost his wife or she has turned unfaithful. Lo ! He marries again.

"Or take the instance of a mother : her son dies and she suffers bitter grief ; but after a few days she forgets all about it. The mother, so overwhelmed with sorrow a few days before, now attends to her toilet and puts on her jewelry. A father becomes bankrupt through the marriage of his daughters, yet he goes on having children year after year. People are ruined by litigation, yet they go to court all the same. There are men who cannot feed the children they have, who cannot clothe them or provide decent shelter for them ; yet they have more children every year.

"Again, the worldly man is like a snake trying to swallow a mole. The snake can neither swallow the mole nor give it up. The bound soul may have realized that there is no substance to the world—that the world is like a hog plum, only stone and skin—but still he cannot give it up and turn his mind to God.

"I once met a relative of Keshab Sen, fifty years old. He was playing cards. As if the time had not yet come for him to think of God !

"There is another characteristic of the bound soul. If you remove him from his worldly surroundings to a spiritual environment, he will pine away. The worm that grows in filth feels very happy there. It thrives in filth. It will die if you put it in a pot of rice."

All remained silent.

VIJAY : "What must the bound soul's condition of mind be in order to achieve liberation ?"

MASTER : "He can free himself from attachment to 'woman and gold' if, by the grace of God, he cultivates a spirit of strong renunciation. What is this strong renunciation ? One who has only a mild spirit of renunciation says, 'Well, all will happen in the course of time ; let me now simply repeat the name of God.' But a man possessed of a strong spirit of renunciation

feels restless for God, as the mother feels for her own child. A man of strong renunciation seeks nothing but God. He regards the world as a deep well and feels as if he were going to be drowned in it. He looks on his relatives as venomous snakes; he wants to fly away from them. And he does go away. He never thinks, 'Let me first make some arrangement for my family and then I shall think of God.' He has great inward resolution.

"Let me tell you a story about strong renunciation. At one time there was a drought in a certain part of the country. The farmers began to cut long channels to bring water to their fields. One farmer was stubbornly determined. He took a vow that he would not stop digging until the channel connected his field with the river. He set to work. The time came for his bath, and his wife sent their daughter to him with oil. 'Father,' said the girl, 'it is already late. Rub your body with oil and take your bath.' 'Go away!' thundered the farmer. 'I have too much to do now.' It was past mid-day, and the farmer was still at work in his field. He didn't even think of his bath. Then his wife came and said: 'Why haven't you taken your bath? The food is getting cold. You overdo everything. You can finish the rest tomorrow or even today after dinner.' The farmer scolded her furiously and ran at her, spade in hand, crying: 'What? Have you no sense? There's no rain. The crops are dying. What will the children eat? You'll all starve to death. I have taken a vow not to think of bath and food today before I bring water to my field.' The wife saw his state of mind and ran away in fear. Through a whole day's back-breaking labour the farmer managed by evening to connect his field with the river. Then he sat down and watched the water flowing into his field with a murmuring sound. His mind was filled with peace and joy. He went home, called his wife, and said to her, 'Now give me some oil and prepare me a smoke.' With serene mind he finished his bath and meal, and retired to bed, where he snored to his heart's content. The determination he showed is an example of strong renunciation.

"Now, there was another farmer who was also digging a channel to bring water to his field. His wife, too, came to the field and said to him: 'It's very late. Come home. It isn't necessary to overdo things.' The farmer didn't protest much, but put aside his spade and said to his wife, 'Well, I'll go home since you ask me to.' (All laugh.) That man never succeeded in irrigating his field. This is a case of mild renunciation.

"As without strong determination the farmer cannot bring water to his field, so also without intense yearning a man cannot realize God. (To Vijay) Why don't you come here now as frequently as before?"

VIJAY: "Sir, I wish to very much, but I am not free. I have accepted work in the Brahmo Samaj."

MASTER: "It is 'woman and gold' that binds man and robs him of his freedom. It is woman that creates the need for gold. For woman one man becomes the slave of another, and so loses his freedom. Then he cannot act as he likes."

"The priests in the temple of Govindaji at Jaipur were celibates at first, and at that time they had fiery natures. Once the King of Jaipur sent for

them; but they didn't obey him. They said to the messenger, 'Ask the king to come to see us.' After consultation, the king and his ministers arranged marriages for them. From then on the king didn't have to send for them. They would come to him of themselves and say: 'Your Majesty, we have come with our blessings. Here are the sacred flowers of the temple. Deign to accept them.' They came to the palace, for now they always wanted money for one thing or another: the building of a house, the rice-taking ceremony of their babies, or the rituals connected with the beginning of their children's education.

"There is the story of the twelve hundred nandas² and thirteen hundred nedis.³ Virabhadra, the son of Nityananda Goswami, had thirteen hundred 'shaven-headed' disciples. They attained great spiritual powers. That alarmed their teacher. 'My disciples have acquired great spiritual powers,' thought Virabhadra. 'Whatever they say to people will come to pass. Wherever they go they may create alarming situations: for people offending them unwittingly will come to grief.' Thinking thus, Virabhadra one day called them to him and said, 'See me after performing your daily devotions on the bank of the Ganges.' These disciples had such a high spiritual nature that, while meditating, they would go into samadhi and be unaware of the river water flowing over their heads during the flood-tide. Then the ebb-tide would come and still they would remain absorbed in meditation.

"Now, one hundred of these disciples had anticipated what their teacher would ask of them. Lest they should have to disobey his injunctions, they had quickly disappeared from the place before he summoned them. So they did not go to Virabhadra with the others. The remaining twelve hundred disciples went to the teacher after finishing their meditation. Virabhadra said to them: 'These thirteen hundred nuns will serve you. I ask you to marry them.' 'As you please, revered sir,' they said. 'But one hundred of us have gone away.' Thenceforth each of these twelve hundred disciples had a wife. Consequently they all lost their spiritual power. Their austerities did not have their original fire. The company of woman robbed them of their spirituality because it destroyed their freedom.

(To Vijay) "You yourself perceive how far you have gone down by being a servant of others. Again, one finds that people with many university degrees, scholars with their vast English education, accept service under their English masters and are daily trampled under their boots. The one cause of all this is woman. They have married and set up a 'gay fair' with their wives and children. Now they cannot go back, much as they would like to. Hence all these insults and humiliations, all this suffering from slavery.

"Once a man realizes God through intense dispassion, he is no longer attached to woman. Even if he must lead the life of a householder, he is free from fear of and attachment to woman. Suppose there are two magnets, one big and the other small. Which one will attract the iron? The big one.

² Literally, "shaven-headed". Among the Vaishnava devotees, those who renounce the world shave their heads.

³ Vaishnava nuns.

of course. God is the big magnet. Compared to Him, woman is a small one. What can 'woman' do ?"

A DEVOTEE : " Sir, shall we hate women then ? "

MASTER : " He who has realized God does not look upon a woman with the eye of lust ; so he is not afraid of her. He perceives clearly that women are but so many aspects of the Divine Mother. He worships them all as the Mother Herself.

(To Vijay) " Come here now and then. I like to see you very much."

VIJAY : " I have to do my various duties in the Brahmo Samaj ; that is why I can't always come here. But I shall visit you whenever I find it possible."

MASTER (to Vijay) : " The task of a religious teacher is indeed difficult. One cannot teach men without a direct command from God. People won't listen to you if you teach without such authority. Such teaching has no force behind it. One must first of all attain God through spiritual discipline or some other means. Thus armed with authority from God, one can deliver lectures.

" After receiving the command from God, one can be a teacher and give lectures anywhere. He who receives authority from God also receives power from Him. Only then can he perform the difficult task of a teacher.

" An insignificant tenant was once engaged in a lawsuit with a big landlord. People realized that there was a powerful man behind the tenant. Perhaps another big landlord was directing the case from behind. Man is an insignificant creature. He cannot fulfil the difficult task of a teacher without receiving power direct from God."

VIJAY : " Don't the teachings of the Brahmo Samaj bring men salvation ? "

MASTER : " How is it ever possible for one man to liberate another from the bondage of the world ? God alone, the Creator of this world-bewitching maya, can save men from maya. There is no other refuge but that great Teacher, Satchidananda. How is it ever possible for men who have not realized God or received His command, and who are not strengthened with divine strength, to save others from the prison-house of the world ?

" One day as I was passing the Panchavati on my way to the pine-grove, I heard a bullfrog croaking. I thought it must have been seized by a snake. After some time, as I was coming back, I could still hear its terrified croaking. I looked to see what was the matter, and found that a water-snake had seized it. The snake could neither swallow it nor give it up. So there was no end to the frog's suffering. I thought that had it been seized by a cobra it would have been silenced after three croaks at the most. As it was only a water-snake, both of them had to go through this agony. A man's ego is destroyed after three croaks, as it were, if he gets into the clutches of a real teacher. But if the teacher is an 'unripe' one, then both the teacher and the disciple undergo endless suffering. The disciple cannot get rid either of his ego or of the shackles of the world. If a disciple falls into the clutches of an incompetent teacher, he doesn't attain liberation."

VIJAY : " Sir, why are we bound like this ? Why don't we see God ? "

• MASTER : " Maya is nothing but the egotism of the embodied soul. This egotism has covered everything like a veil. ' All troubles come to an end when the ego dies.' If by the grace of God a man but once realizes that he is not the doer, then he at once becomes a jivanmukta. Though living in the body, he is liberated. He has nothing else to fear.

" This maya, that is to say, the ego, is like a cloud. The sun cannot be seen on account of a thin patch of cloud ; when that disappears one sees the sun. If by the grace of the guru one's ego vanishes, then one sees God.

" Rama, who is God Himself, was only two and a half cubits ahead of Lakshmana. But Lakshmana couldn't see Him because Sita stood between them. Lakshmana may be compared to the jiva, and Sita to maya. Man cannot see God on account of the barrier of maya. Just look : I am creating a barrier in front of my face with this towel. Now you can't see me, even though I am so near. Likewise, God is the nearest of all, but we cannot see Him on account of this covering of maya !

" The jiva is nothing but the embodiment of Satchidananda. But since maya, or ego, has created various upadhis, he has forgotten his real Self.

" Each upadhi changes man's nature. If he wears a fine black-bordered cloth, you will at once find him humming Nidhu Babu's love-songs. Then playing-cards and a walking-stick follow. If even a sickly man puts on high boots, he begins to whistle and climbs the stairs like an Englishman, jumping from one step to another. If a man but holds a pen in his hand, he scribbles on any paper he can get hold of—such is the power of the pen !

" Money is also a great upadhi. The possession of money makes such a difference in a man ! He is no longer the same person. A brahmin used to frequent the temple garden. Outwardly he was very modest. One day I went to Konnagar with Hriday. No sooner did we get off the boat than we noticed the brahmin seated on the bank of the Ganges. We thought he had been enjoying the fresh air. Looking at us, he said : ' Hello there, priest ! How do you do ? ' I marked his tone and said to Hriday : ' The man must have got some money. That's why he talks that way.' Hriday laughed.

" A frog had a rupee, which he kept in his hole. One day an elephant was going over the hole, and the frog, coming out in a fit of anger, raised his foot, as if to kick the elephant, and said, ' How dare you walk over my head ? Such is the pride that money begets !

" One can get rid of the ego after the attainment of Knowledge. On attaining Knowledge one goes into samadhi, and the ego disappears. But it is very difficult to obtain such Knowledge.

" It is said in the Vedas that a man experiences samadhi when his mind ascends to the seventh plane. The ego can disappear only when one goes into samadhi. Where does the mind of a man ordinarily dwell ? In the first three planes. These are at the organs of evacuation and generation, and at the navel. Then the mind is immersed only in worldliness, attached to ' woman and gold '. A man sees the light of God when his mind dwells in the plane of the heart. He sees the light and exclaims : ' Ah ! What is this ? What is this ? ' The next plane is at the throat. When the mind dwells there he likes to hear and talk

only of God. When the mind ascends to the next plane, in the forehead, between the eyebrows, he sees the form of Satchidananda and desires to touch and embrace It. But he is unable to do so. It is like the light in a lantern, which you can see but cannot touch. You feel as if you were touching the light, but in reality you are not. When the mind reaches the seventh plane, then the ego vanishes completely and the man goes into samadhi."

VIJAY : "What does a man see when he attains the Knowledge of Brahman after reaching the seventh plane ?"

MASTER : "What happens when the mind reaches the seventh plane cannot be described.

"Once a boat enters the 'black waters' of the ocean, it does not return. Nobody knows what happens to the boat after that. Therefore the boat cannot give us any information about the ocean.

"Once a salt doll went to measure the depth of the ocean. No sooner did it enter the water than it melted. Now who could tell how deep the ocean was ? That which could have told about its depth had melted. Reaching the seventh plane, the mind is annihilated ; man goes into samadhi. What he feels then cannot be described in words.

"The 'I' that makes one a worldly person and attaches one to 'woman and gold' is the 'wicked I'. The intervention of this ego creates the difference between jiva and Atman. Water appears to be divided into two parts if one puts a stick across it. But in reality there is only one water. It appears as two on account of the stick. This 'I' is the stick. Remove the stick and there remains only one water as before.

"Now, what is this 'wicked I' ? It is the ego that says : 'What ? Don't they know me ? I have so much money ! Who is wealthier than I ? ' If a thief robs such a man of only ten rupees, first of all he wrings the money out of the thief, then he gives him a good beating. But the matter doesn't end there : the thief is handed over to the police and is eventually sent to jail. The 'wicked I' says : 'What ? Doesn't the rogue know whom he has robbed ? To steal my ten rupees ! How dare he ? '

'VIJAY : "If without destroying the 'I' a man cannot get rid of attachment to the world and consequently cannot experience samadhi, then it would be wise for him to follow the path of Brahmajnana to attain samadhi. If the 'I' persists in the path of devotion, then one should rather choose the path of knowledge."

MASTER : "It is true that one or two can get rid of the 'I' through samadhi ; but these cases are very rare. You may indulge in thousands of reasonings, but still the 'I' comes back. You may cut the peepal-tree to the very root today, but you will notice a sprout springing up tomorrow. Therefore if the 'I' must remain, let the rascal remain as the 'servant I'. As long as you live, you should say, 'O God, Thou art the Master and I am Thy servant.' The 'I' that feels, 'I am the servant of God, I am His devotee' does not injure one. Sweet things cause acidity of the stomach, no doubt, but sugar candy is an exception.

"The path of knowledge is very difficult. One cannot obtain Knowledge unless one gets rid of the feeling that one is the body. In the Kaliyuga the

life of man is centred on food. He cannot get rid of the feeling that he is the body and the ego. Therefore the path of devotion is prescribed for this cycle. This is an easy path. You will attain God if you sing His name and glories and pray to Him with a longing heart. There is not the least doubt about it.

"Suppose you draw a line on the surface of water with a bamboo stick. The water appears to be divided into two parts ; but the line doesn't remain for any length of time. The 'servant I' or the 'devotee I' or the 'child I' is only a line drawn with the ego and is not real."

VIJAY (*to the Master*) : "Sir, you ask us to renounce the 'wicked I'. Is there any harm in the 'servant I' ?"

MASTER : "The 'servant I'—that is, the feeling, 'I am the servant of God, I am the devotee of God'—does not injure one. On the contrary, it helps one to realize God."

VIJAY : "Well, sir, what becomes of the lust, anger, and other passions of one who keeps the 'servant I' ?"

MASTER : "If a man truly feels like that, then he has only the semblance of lust, anger, and the like. If, after attaining God, he looks on himself as the servant or the devotee of God, then he cannot injure anyone. By touching the philosopher's stone a sword is turned into gold. It keeps the appearance of a sword but cannot injure.

"When the dry branch of a coconut palm drops to the ground, it leaves only a mark on the trunk indicating that once there was a branch at that place. In like manner, he who has attained God keeps only an appearance of ego ; there remains in him only a semblance of anger and lust. He becomes like a child. A child has no attachment to the three gunas—sattva, rajas, and tamas. He becomes as quickly detached from a thing as he becomes attached to it. You can cajole him out of a cloth worth five rupees with a doll worth an anna, though at first he may say with great determination : 'No, I won't give it to you. My daddy bought it for me.' Again, all persons are the same to a child. He has no feeling of high and low in regard to persons. So he doesn't discriminate about caste. If his mother tells him that a particular man should be regarded as an elder brother, the child will eat from the same plate with him, though the man may belong to the low caste of a blacksmith. The child doesn't know hate, or what is holy or unholy.

"Even after attaining samadhi, some retain the 'servant ego' or the 'devotee ego'. The bhakta keeps this 'I-consciousness'. He says, 'O God, Thou art the Master and I am Thy servant ; Thou art the Lord and I am Thy devotee.' He feels that way even after the realization of God. His 'I' is not completely effaced. Again, by constantly practising this kind of 'I-consciousness', one ultimately attains God. This is called bhaktiyoga.

"One can attain the Knowledge of Brahman, too, by following the path of bhakti. God is all-powerful. He may give His devotee Brahmajnana also, if He so wills. But the devotee generally doesn't seek the Knowledge of the Absolute. He would rather have the consciousness that God is the Master and he the servant, or that God is the Divine Mother and he the child."

VIJAY : "But those who discriminate according to the Vedanta philosophy also realize Him in the end, don't they ?"

MASTER : "Yes, one may reach Him by following the path of discrimination too : that is called jnanayoga. But it is an extremely difficult path. I have told you already of the seven planes of consciousness. On reaching the seventh plane the mind goes into samadhi. If a man acquires the firm knowledge that Brahman alone is real and the world illusory, then his mind merges in samadhi. [But in the Kaliyuga the life of a man depends entirely on food. How can he have the consciousness that Brahman alone is real and the world illusory ? In the Kaliyuga it is difficult to have the feeling, 'I am not the body, I am not the mind, I am not the twenty-four cosmic principles ; I am beyond pleasure and pain, I am above disease and grief, old age and death.' However you may reason and argue, the feeling that the body is identical with the soul will somehow crop up from an unexpected quarter. You may cut a peepal-tree to the ground and think it is dead to its very root, but the next morning you will find a new sprout shooting up from the dead stump. One cannot get rid of this identification with the body ; therefore the path of bhakti is best for the people of the Kaliyuga. It is an easy path.

"And, 'I don't want to become sugar ; I want to eat it.' I never feel like saying, 'I am Brahman.' I say, 'Thou art my Lord and I am Thy servant.' It is better to make the mind go up and down between the fifth and sixth planes, like a boat racing between two points. I don't want to go beyond the sixth plane and keep my mind a long time in the seventh. My desire is to sing the name and glories of God. It is very good to look on God as the Master and oneself as His servant. Further, you see, people speak of the waves as belonging to the Ganges ; but no one says that the Ganges belongs to the waves. The feeling, 'I am He', is not wholesome. A man who entertains such an idea, while looking on his body as the Self, causes himself great harm. He cannot go forward in spiritual life ; he drags himself down. He deceives himself as well as others. He cannot understand his own state of mind.

"But it isn't any and every kind of bhakti that enables one to realize God. One cannot realize God without prema-bhakti. Another name for prema-bhakti is raga-bhakti. God cannot be realized without love and longing. Unless one has learnt to love God, one cannot realize Him.

"There is another kind of bhakti, known as vaidhi-bhakti, according to which one must repeat the name of God a fixed number of times, fast, make pilgrimages, worship God with prescribed offerings, make so many sacrifices, and so forth and so on. By continuing such practices a long time one gradually acquires raga-bhakti. God cannot be realized until one has raga-bhakti. One must love God. In order to realize God one must be completely free from worldliness and direct all of one's mind to Him.

"But some acquire raga-bhakti directly. It is innate in them. They have it from their very childhood. Even at an early age they weep for God. An instance of such bhakti is to be found in Prahlada. Vaidhi-bhakti is like moving a fan to make a breeze. One needs the fan to make the breeze.

* Supreme love, which makes one attached only to God.



Similarly, one practises japa, austerity, and fasting, in order to acquire love of God. But the fan is set aside when the southern breeze blows of itself. Such actions as japa and austerity drop away when one spontaneously feels love and attachment for God. Who, indeed, will perform the ceremonies enjoined in the scriptures, when mad with love of God?

"Devotion to God may be said to be 'green' so long as it doesn't grow into love of God; but it becomes 'ripe' when it has grown into such love."

"A man with 'green' bhakti cannot assimilate spiritual talk and instruction; but one with 'ripe' bhakti can. The image that falls on a photographic plate covered with black film¹ is retained. On the other hand, thousands of images may be reflected on a bare piece of glass, but not one of them is retained. As the object moves away, the glass becomes the same as it was before. One cannot assimilate spiritual instruction unless one has already developed love of God."

VIJAY : "Is bhakti alone sufficient for the attainment of God, for His vision?"

MASTER : "Yes, one can see God through bhakti alone! But it must be 'ripe' bhakti, prema-bhakti and raga-bhakti. When one has that bhakti, one loves God even as the mother loves the child, the child the mother, or the wife the husband.

"When one has such love and attachment for God, one doesn't feel the attraction of maya to wife, children, relatives, and friends. One retains only compassion for them. To such a man the world appears a strange land, a place where he has merely to perform his duties. It is like a man's having his real home in the country, but coming to Calcutta for work; he has to rent a house in Calcutta for the sake of his duties. When one develops love of God, one completely gets rid of one's attachment to the world and worldly wisdom.

"One cannot see God if one has even the slightest trace of worldliness. Match-sticks, if damp, won't strike fire though you rub a thousand of them against the match-box. You only waste a heap of sticks. The mind soaked in worldliness is such a damp match-stick. Once Sri Radha said to her friends that she saw Krishna everywhere—both within and without. The friends answered : 'Why, we don't see Him at all. Are you delirious?' Radha said, 'Friends, paint your eyes with the collyrium of divine love, and then you will see Him.'

(To Vijay) "It is said in a song of your Brahmo Samaj :

O Lord, is it ever possible to know Thee without love,
However much one may perform worship and sacrifice?

"If the devotee but once feels this attachment and ecstatic love for God, this mature devotion and longing, then he sees God in both His aspects, with form and without form."

VIJAY : "How can one see God?"

MASTER : "One cannot see God without purity of heart. Through attachment to 'woman and gold' the mind has become stained—covered with dirt.

¹ Silver nitrate.

as it were. A magnet cannot attract a needle if the needle is covered with mud. Wash away the mud and the magnet will draw it. Likewise, the dirt of the mind can be washed away with the tears of our eyes. This stain is removed if one sheds tears of repentance and says, 'O God, I shall never again do such a thing.' Thereupon God, who is like the magnet, draws to Himself the mind, which is like the needle. Then the devotee goes into samadhi and obtains the vision of God.

"You may try thousands of times, but nothing can be achieved without God's grace. One cannot see God without His grace. Is it an easy thing to receive the grace of God? One must altogether renounce egotism; one cannot see God as long as one feels, 'I am the doer.' Suppose, in a family, a man has taken charge of the store-room; then if someone asks the master, 'Sir, will you yourself kindly give me something from the store-room?', the master says to him: 'There is already someone in the store-room. What can I do there?'

"God doesn't easily appear in the heart of a man who feels himself to be his own master. But God can be seen the moment His grace descends. He is the Sun of Knowledge. One single ray of His has illumined the world with the light of knowledge. That is how we are able to see one another and acquire varied knowledge. One can see God only if He turns His light toward His own face.

"The police sergeant goes his rounds in the dark of night with a lantern⁶ in his hand. No one sees his face; but with the help of that light the sergeant sees everybody's face, and others, too, can see one another. If you want to see the sergeant, however, you must pray to him: 'Sir, please turn the light on your own face. Let me see you.' In the same way one must pray to God: 'O Lord, be gracious and turn the light of knowledge on Thyself, that I may see Thy face.'

"A house without light indicates poverty. So one must light the lamp of Knowledge in one's heart. As it is said in a song:

Lighting the lamp of Knowledge in the chamber of your heart,
Behold the face of the Mother, Brahman's Embodiment."

As Vijay had brought medicine with him, the Master asked a devotee to give him some water. He was indeed a fountain of infinite compassion. He had arranged for Vijay's boat fare, since the latter was too poor to pay it. Vijay, Balaram, M., and the other devotees left for Calcutta in a country boat.

Monday, January 1, 1883

At eight o'clock in the morning Sri Ramakrishna was seated on a mat spread on the floor of his room at Dakshineswar. Since it was a cold day, he had wrapped his body in his moleskin shawl. Prankrishna and M. were seated in front of him. Rakhal, too, was in the room. Prankrishna was a high government official and lived in Calcutta. Since he had had no offspring by his first wife, with her permission he had married a second time. By the

⁶A reference to the lantern carried by the night-watch, which has dark glass on three sides.



second wife he had a son. Because he was rather stout, the Master addressed him now and then as "the fat brahmin". He had great respect for Sri Ramakrishna. Though a householder, Prankrishna studied the Vedanta and had been heard to say : "Brahman alone is real and the world illusory. I am He." The Master used to say to him : "In the Kaliyuga the life of a man depends on food. The path of devotion prescribed by Narada is best for this age."

A devotee had brought a basket of jilipi for the Master, which the latter kept by his side. Eating a bit of the sweets, he said to Prankrishna with a smile : "You see, I chant the name of the Divine Mother : so I get all these good things to eat. (*Laughter.*) But She doesn't give such fruits as gourd or pumpkin. She bestows the fruit of Amrita, Immortality—knowledge, love, discrimination, renunciation, and so forth."

A boy six or seven years old entered the room. The Master himself became like a child. He covered the contents of the basket with the palm of his hand, as a child does to conceal sweets from another child lest the latter should snatch them. Then he put the basket aside.

Suddenly the Master went into samadhi and sat thus a long time. His body was transfixed, his eyes wide open and unwinking, his breathing hardly perceptible. After a long time he drew a deep breath, indicating his return to the world of sense.

MASTER (*to Prankrishna*) : "My Divine Mother is not only formless. She has forms as well. One can see Her forms. One can behold Her incomparable beauty through feeling and love. The Mother reveals Herself to Her devotees in different forms.

"I saw Her yesterday. She was clad in a seamless ochre-coloured garment, and She talked with me.

"She came to me another day as a Mussalman girl six or seven years old. She had a tilak on her forehead and was naked. She walked with me, joking and frisking like a child.

"At Hriday's house I had a vision of Gauranga. He wore a black-bordered cloth.

"Haladhari used to say that God is beyond both Being and Non-being. I told the Mother about it and asked Her, 'Then is the divine form an illusion ?' The Divine Mother appeared to me in the form of Rati's mother and said, 'Do thou remain in bhava.'⁷ I repeated this to Haladhari. Now and then I forget Her command and suffer. Once I broke my teeth because I didn't remain in bhava. So I shall remain in bhava unless I receive a revelation from heaven or have a direct experience to the contrary. I shall follow the path of love. What do you say ?"

PRANKRISHNA : "Yes, sir."

MASTER : "But why should I ask you about it ? There is Someone within me who does all these things through me. At times I used to remain in a mood of Godhood and would enjoy no peace of mind unless I were being worshipped.

⁷ A rare state of divine exaltation, when the devotee, after realizing the Absolute, remains in the borderland between the Absolute and the Relative ; in this state he sees that both the Absolute and the Relative, as the two aspects of the Godhead, are real.

"I am the machine and God is the Operator. I act as He makes me act. I speak as He makes me speak.

Keep your raft, says Ramprasad, afloat on the sea of life,
Drifting up with the flood-tide, drifting down with the ebb.

"It is like the cast-off leaf before a gale ; sometimes it is blown to a good place and sometimes into the gutter, according to the direction of the wind.

"As the weaver said in the story : 'The robbery was committed by the will of Rama, I was arrested by the police by the will of Rama, and again, by the will of Rama, I was set free.'

"Hanuman once said to Rama : 'O Rama, I have taken refuge in Thee. Bless me that I may have pure devotion to Thy Lotus Feet and that I may not be caught in the spell of Thy world-bewitching maya.'

"Once a dying bullfrog said to Rama : 'O Rama, when caught by a snake I cry for Your protection. But now I am about to die, struck by Your arrow. Hence I am silent.'

"I used to see God directly with these very eyes, just as I see you. Now I see divine visions in trance.

"After realizing God a man becomes like a child. One acquires the nature of the object one meditates upon. The nature of God is like that of a child. As a child builds up his toy house and then breaks it down, so God acts while creating, preserving, and destroying the universe. Further, as the child is not under the control of any guna, so God is beyond the three gunas—sattva, rajas, and tamas. That is why paramahamsas keep five or ten children with them, that they may assume their nature."

Sitting on the floor in the room was a young man from Agarpura about twenty-two years old. Whenever he came to the temple garden, he would take the Master aside, by a sign, and whisper his thoughts to him. He was a newcomer. That day he was sitting on the floor near the Master.

MASTER (*to the young man*) : "A man can change his nature by imitating another's character. He can get rid of a passion like lust by assuming the feminine mood. He gradually comes to act exactly like a woman. I have noticed that men who take female parts in the theatre speak like women or brush their teeth like women while bathing. Come again on a Tuesday or Saturday.

(*To Prankrishna*) "Brahman and Sakti are inseparable. Unless you accept Sakti, you will find the whole universe unreal—'I', 'you', house, buildings, and family. The world stands solid because the Primordial Energy stands behind it. If there is no supporting pole, no framework can be made, and without the framework there can be no beautiful image of Durga.

"Without giving up worldliness a man cannot awaken his spiritual consciousness, nor can he realize God. He cannot but be a hypocrite as long as he has even a trace of worldly desire. God cannot be realized without guilelessness.

Cherish love within your heart ; abandon cunning and deceit :
Through service, worship, selflessness, does Rama's blessed
vision come.

Even those engaged in worldly activities, such as office work or business, should hold to the truth. Truthfulness alone is the spiritual discipline in the Kaliyuga."

PRANKRISHNA : "Yes, sir. It is said in the *Mahanirvana Tantra* : 'O Goddess, this religion enjoins it upon one to be truthful, self-controlled, devoted to the welfare of others, unagitated, and compassionate.'"

MASTER : "Yes. But these ideas must be assimilated."

Sri Ramakrishna was sitting on the small couch. He was in an ecstatic mood and looked at Rakhal. Suddenly he was filled with the tender feeling of parental love toward his young disciple and spiritual child. Presently he went into samadhi. The devotees sat speechless, looking at the Master with wondering eyes.

Regaining partial consciousness, the Master said : "Why is my spiritual feeling kindled at the sight of Rakhal ? The more you advance toward God, the less you will see of His glories and grandeur. The aspirant at first has a vision of the Goddess with ten arms ;⁵ there is a great display of power in that image. The next vision is that of the Deity with two arms ; there are no longer ten arms holding various weapons and missiles. Then the aspirant has a vision of Gopala, in which there is no trace of power. It is the form of a tender child. Beyond that there are other visions also. The aspirant then sees only Light.

"Reasoning and discrimination vanish after the attainment of God and communion with Him in samadhi. How long does a man reason and discriminate ? As long as he is conscious of the manifold, as long as he is aware of the universe, of embodied beings, 'I' and 'you'. He becomes silent when he is truly aware of Unity. This was the case with Trailinga Swami.⁶

"Have you watched a feast given to the brahmins ? At first there is a great uproar. But the noise lessens as their stomachs become more and more filled with food. When the last course of curd and sweets is served, one hears only the sound 'soop, soop' as they scoop up the curd in their hands. There is no other sound. Next is the stage of sleep—samadhi. There is no more uproar.

(To M. and Prankrishna) "Many people talk of Brahmajnana, but their minds are always preoccupied with lower things : house, buildings, money, name, and sense pleasures. As long as you stand at the foot of the Monument,¹⁰ so long do you see horses, carriages, Englishmen, and Englishwomen. But when you climb to its top, you behold the sky and the ocean stretching to infinity. Then you do not enjoy buildings, carriages, horses, or men. They look like ants.

"All such things as attachment to the world and enthusiasm for 'woman and gold' disappear after the attainment of the Knowledge of Brahman. Then comes the cessation of all passions. When the log burns, it makes a crackling

⁵ The allusion is to the image of Durga.

⁶ A noted monk of Benares whom the Master once met. The Swami observed a vow of silence.

¹⁰ A reference to the Ochterlony Monument in Calcutta.

noise and one sees the flame. But when the burning is over and only ash remains, then no more noise is heard. Thirst disappears with the destruction of attachment. Finally comes peace.

"The nearer you come to God, the more you feel peace. Peace, peace, peace—supreme peace! The nearer you come to the Ganges, the more you feel its coolness. You will feel completely soothed when you plunge into the river.

"But the universe and its created beings, and the twenty-four cosmic principles, all exist because God exists. Nothing remains if God is eliminated. The number increases if you put many zeros after the figure one; but the zeros don't have any value if the one is not there."

The Master continued: "There are some who come down, as it were, after attaining the Knowledge of Brahman—after samadhi—and retain the 'ego of Knowledge' or the 'ego of Devotion', just as there are people who, of their own sweet will, stay in the market-place after the market breaks up. This was the case with sages like Narada. They kept the 'ego of Devotion' for the purpose of teaching men. Sankaracharya kept the 'ego of Knowledge' for the same purpose.

"God cannot be realized if there is the slightest attachment to the things of the world. A thread cannot pass through the eye of a needle if the tiniest fibre sticks out.

"The anger and lust of a man who has realized God are only appearances. They are like a burnt string. It looks like a string, but a mere puff blows it away.

"God is realized as soon as the mind becomes free from attachment. Whatever appears in the Pure Mind is the voice of God. That which is Pure Mind is also Pure Buddhi; that, again, is Pure Atman, because there is nothing pure but God. But in order to realize God one must go beyond dharma and adharma."

The Master sang in his melodious voice :

Come, let us go for a walk, O mind, to Kali, the Wish-fulfilling
Tree,
And there beneath It gather the four fruits of life. || . . .

Sri Ramakrishna went out on the southeast verandah of his room and sat down. Prankrishna and the other devotees accompanied him. Hazra, too, was sitting there. The Master said to Prankrishna with a smile: "Hazra is not a man to be trifled with. If one finds the big dargah here," then Hazra is the smaller dargah." All laughed at the Master's words. A certain gentleman, Navakumar by name, came to the door and stood there. At sight of the devotees he immediately left. "Oh! Egotism incarnate!" Sri Ramakrishna remarked.

About half past nine in the morning Prankrishna took leave of the Master. Soon afterwards a minstrel sang some devotional songs to the accompaniment of a stringed instrument. The Master was listening to the songs when Kedar Chatterji, a householder devotee, entered the room clad in his

¹¹ Referring to himself.

office clothes. He was a man of devotional temperament and cherished the attitude of the gopis of Vrindavan. Words about God would make him weep.

The sight of Kedar awakened in the Master's mind the episode of Vrindavan in Sri Krishna's life. Intoxicated with divine love, the Master stood up and sang, addressing Kedar :

Tell me, friend, how far is the grove
Where Krishna, my Beloved, dwells ?
His fragrance reaches me even here ;
But I am tired and can walk no farther. . . .

Sri Ramakrishna assumed the attitude of Sri Radha to Krishna and went into deep samadhi while singing the song. He stood there, still as a picture on canvas, with tears of divine joy running down his cheeks.

Kedar knelt before the Master. Touching his feet, he chanted a hymn :

We worship the Brahman-Consciousness in the Lotus of the Heart,
The Undifferentiated, who is adored by Hari, Hara, and Brahma ;
Who is attained by yogis in the depths of their meditation :
The Scatterer of the fear of birth and death,
The Essence of Knowledge and Truth, the Primal Seed of the world.

After a time the Master regained consciousness of the relative world. Soon Kedar took his leave and returned to his office in Calcutta.

At midday Ramlal brought the Master a plate of food that had been offered in the Kali temple. Like a child he ate a little of everything.

Later in the afternoon several Marwari devotees entered the Master's room, where Rakhal and M. also were seated.

A MARWARI DEVOTEE : "Sir, what is the way ? "

MASTER : "There are two ways. One is the path of discrimination, the other is that of love. Discrimination means to know the distinction between the Real and the unreal. God alone is the real and permanent Substance ; all else is illusory and impermanent. The magician alone is real ; his magic is illusory. This is discrimination.

"Discrimination and renunciation. Discrimination means to know the distinction between the Real and the unreal. Renunciation means to have dispassion for the things of the world. One cannot acquire them all of a sudden. They must be practised every day. One should renounce 'woman and gold' mentally at first. Then, by the will of God, one can renounce it both mentally and outwardly. It is impossible to ask the people of Calcutta to renounce all for the sake of God. One has to tell them to renounce mentally.

"Through the discipline of constant practice one is able to give up attachment to 'woman and gold'. That is what the *Gita* says. By practice one acquires uncommon power of mind. Then one doesn't find it difficult to subdue the sense-organs and to bring anger, lust, and the like under control. Such a man behaves like a tortoise, which, once it has tucked in its limbs, never puts them out. You cannot make the tortoise put its limbs out again, though you chop it to pieces with an axe."

MARWARI DEVOTEE : " Revered sir, you just mentioned two paths. What is the other path ? "

MASTER : " The path of bhakti, or zealous love of God. Weep for God in solitude, with a restless soul, and ask Him to reveal Himself to you.

Cry to your Mother Syama with a real cry, O mind !
And how can She hold Herself from you ? "

MARWARI DEVOTEE : " Sir, what is the meaning of the worship of the Personal God ? And what is the meaning of God without form or attribute ? "

MASTER : " As you recall your father by his photograph, so likewise the worship of the image reveals in a flash the nature of Reality.

" Do you know what God with form is like ? Like bubbles rising on an expanse of water, various divine forms are seen to rise out of the Great Akasa of Consciousness. The Incarnation of God is one of these forms. The Primal Energy sports, as it were, through the activities of a Divine Incarnation.

" What is there in mere scholarship ? God can be attained by crying to Him with a longing heart. There is no need to know many things.

" He who is an acharya has to know different things. One needs a sword and shield to kill others ; but to kill oneself, a needle or a nail-knife suffices.

" One ultimately discovers God by trying to know who this ' I ' is. Is this ' I ' the flesh, the bones, the blood, or the marrow ? Is it the mind or the buddhi ? Analysing thus, you realize at last that you are none of these. This is called the process of ' Neti, neti ', ' Not this, not this '. One can neither comprehend nor touch the Atman. It is without qualities or attributes.

" But, according to the path of devotion, God has attributes. To a devotee Krishna is Spirit, His Abode is Spirit, and everything about Him is Spirit. "

The Marwari devotees saluted the Master and took their leave.

At the approach of evening Sri Ramakrishna went out to look at the sacred river. The lamp was lighted in his room. The Master chanted the hallowed name of the Divine Mother and meditated on Her. Then the evening worship began in the various temples. The sound of gongs, floating on the air, mingled with the murmuring voice of the river. Peace and blessedness reigned everywhere. *Q~u u*

VIII

THE MASTER'S BIRTHDAY CELEBRATION AT DAKSHINESWAR

10 a.m. 1883 Sunday, February 18, 1883

SRI RAMAKRISHNA arrived at Govinda Mukherji's house at Belgharia, near Calcutta. Besides Narendra, Ram, and other devotees, some of Govinda's neighbours were present. The Master first sang and danced with the devotees. After the kirtan they sat down. Many saluted the Master. Now and then he would say, "Bow before God."

"It is God alone", he said, "who has become all this. But in certain places—for instance, in a holy man—there is a greater manifestation than in others. You may say, there are wicked men also. That is true, even as there are tigers and lions; but one need not hug the 'tiger God'. One should keep away from him and salute him from a distance. Take water, for instance. Some water may be drunk, some may be used for worship, some for bathing, and some only for washing dishes."

A NEIGHBOUR: "Revered sir, what are the doctrines of Vedanta?"

MASTER: "The Vedantist says, 'I am He.' Brahman is real and the world illusory. Even the 'I' is illusory. Only the Supreme Brahman exists."

"But the 'I' cannot be got rid of. Therefore it is good to have the feeling, 'I am the servant of God, His son, His devotee.'

"For the Kaliyuga the path of bhakti is especially good.* One can realize God through bhakti too. As long as one is conscious of the body, one is also conscious of objects. Form, taste, smell, sound, and touch—these are the objects. It is extremely difficult to get rid of the consciousness of objects. And one cannot realize 'I am He' as long as one is aware of objects.

"The sannyasi is very little conscious of worldly objects. But the householder is always engrossed in them. Therefore it is good for him to feel, 'I am the servant of God.'"

NEIGHBOUR: "Sir, we are sinners. What will happen to us?"

MASTER: "All the sins of the body fly away if one chants the name of God and sings His glories. The birds of sin dwell in the tree of the body. Singing the name of God is like clapping your hands. As, at a clap of the hands, the birds in the tree fly away, so do our sins disappear at the chanting of God's name and glories."

"Again, you find that the water of a reservoir dug in a meadow is evaporated by the heat of the sun. Likewise, the water of the reservoir of sin is dried up by the singing of the name and glories of God."

"You must practise it every day. The other day, at the circus, I saw a horse running at top speed, with an Englishwoman standing on one foot on its back. How much she must have practised to acquire that skill!"

"Weep at least once to see God."

"These, then, are the two means : practice and passionate attachment to God, that is to say, restlessness of the soul to see Him."

Sri Ramakrishna began his midday meal with the devotees. It was about one o'clock. A devotee sang in the courtyard below :

Awake, Mother ! Awake ! How long Thou hast been asleep
In the lotus of the Muladhara !
Fulfil Thy secret function, Mother :
Rise to the thousand-petalled lotus within the head,
Where mighty Siva has His dwelling ;
Swiftly pierce the six lotuses
And take away my grief, O Essence of Consciousness !

Hearing the song, Sri Ramakrishna went into samadhi ; his whole body became still, and his hand remained touching the plate of food. He could eat no more. After a long time his mind came down partially to the plane of the sense world, and he said, "I want to go downstairs." A devotee led him down very carefully. Still in an abstracted mood, he sat near the singer. The song had ended. The Master said to him very humbly, "Sir, I want to hear the chanting of the Mother's name again."

The musician sang :

Awake, Mother ! Awake ! How long Thou hast been asleep
In the lotus of the Muladhara ! . . .

The Master again went into ecstasy.

February 25, 1883

After his noon meal the Master conversed with the devotees. Ram, Kedar, Nityagopāl, M., and others had arrived from Calcutta. Rakhal, Harish, Latu, and Hazra were living with the Master. Mr. Choudhury, who had three or four university degrees and was a government officer, was also present. He had recently lost his wife and had visited the Master several times for peace of mind.

MASTER (to Ram and the other devotees) : "Devotees like Rakhal, Narendra, and Bhavanath may be called nityasiddha. Their spiritual consciousness has been awake since their very birth. They assume human bodies only to impart spiritual illumination to others."

"There is another class of devotees, known as kripasiddha, that is to say, those on whom the grace of God descends all of a sudden and who at once attain His vision and Knowledge. Such people may be likened to a room that has been dark a thousand years, which, when a lamp is brought into it, becomes light immediately, not little by little."

* "Those who lead a householder's life should practise spiritual discipline ; they should pray eagerly to God in solitude. (*To Mr. Choudhury*) God cannot be realized through scholarship. Who, indeed, can understand the things of the Spirit through reason ? No, all should strive for devotion to the Lotus Feet of God.

"Infinite are the glories of God ! How little can you fathom them ! Can you ever find out the meaning of God's ways ?

"Bhishma was none other than one of the eight Vasus, but even he shed tears on his bed of arrows. He said : 'How astonishing ! God Himself is the companion of the Pandava brothers, and still there is no end to their troubles and sorrows !' Who can ever understand the ways of God ?

"A man thinks, 'I have practised a little prayer and austerity ; so I have gained a victory over others.' But victory and defeat lie with God. I have seen a prostitute dying in the Ganges and retaining consciousness¹ to the end."

MR. CHOUDHURY : "How can one see God ?"

MASTER : "Not with these eyes. God gives one divine eyes ; and only then can one behold Him. God gave Arjuna divine eyes so that he might see His Universal Form.²

"Your philosophy is mere speculation. It only reasons. God cannot be realized that way.

"God cannot remain unmoved if you have raga-bhakti, that is, love of God with passionate attachment to Him. Do you know how fond God is of His devotees' love ? It is like the cow's fondness for fodder mixed with oil-cake. The cow gobble it down greedily.

"Raga-bhakti is pure love of God, a love that seeks God alone and not any worldly end. Prahlada had it. Suppose you go to a wealthy man every day, but you seek no favour of him ; you simply love to see him. If he wants to show you favour, you say : 'No, sir. I don't need anything. I came just to see you.' Such is love of God for its own sake. You simply love God and don't want anything from Him in return."

Saying this, the Master sang :

Though I³ am never loath to grant salvation,
I hesitate indeed to grant pure love.
Whoever wins pure love surpasses all :
He is adored by men ;
He triumphs over the three worlds. . . .

He continued, "The gist of the whole thing is that one must develop passionate yearning for God and practise discrimination and renunciation."

MR. CHOUDHURY : "Sir, is it not possible to have the vision of God without the help of a guru ?"

MASTER : "Satchidananda Himself is the Guru. At the end of the savasadhana, just when the vision of the Ishta is about to take place, the guru

¹ Dying in the Ganges while retaining full consciousness is considered by the Hindus an act of great spiritual merit and the result of pious living.

² An allusion to the eleventh chapter of the *Bhagavad Gita*.

³ The song represents Sri Krishna's words.

appears before the aspirant and says to him, 'Behold ! There is your Ishta.' Saying this, the guru merges in the Ishta. He who is the guru is also the Ishta. The guru is the thread that leads to God. Women perform a ritualistic worship known as the 'Ananta-vrata', the object of worship being the Infinite. But actually the Deity worshipped is Vishnu. In Him are the 'infinite' forms of God.

(To Ram and the other devotees) "If you asked me which form of God you should meditate upon, I should say : Fix your attention on that form which appeals to you most ; but know for certain that all forms are the forms of one God alone.

"Never harbour malice toward anyone. Siva, Kali, and Hari are but different forms of that One. He is blessed indeed who has known all as one.

Outwardly he appears as Siva's devotee,
But in his heart he worships Kali, the Blissful Mother,
And with his tongue he chants aloud Lord Hari's name.

"The body does not endure without a trace of lust, anger, and the like. You should try to reduce them to a minimum."

Looking at Kedar, the Master said : "He is very nice. He accepts both the Absolute and the Relative. He believes in Brahman, but he also accepts the gods and Divine Incarnations in human form."

In Kedar's opinion Sri Ramakrishna was such an incarnation.

Looking at Nityagopal, the Master said to the devotees, "He is in a lofty mood.

(To Nityagopal) "Don't go there too often. You may go once in a while. She may be a devotee, but she is a woman too. Therefore I warn you.

The sannyasi must observe very strict discipline. He must not look even at the picture of a woman. But this rule doesn't apply to householders. An aspirant should not associate with a woman, even though she is very much devoted to God. A sannyasi, even though he may have subdued his passions, should follow this discipline to set an example to householders.

"Worldly people learn renunciation by seeing the complete renunciation of a monk ; otherwise they sink more and more. A sannyasi is a world teacher."

Friday, March 9, 1883

About nine o'clock in the morning the Master was seated in his room with Rakhal, M., and a few other devotees. It was the day of the new moon. As usual with him on such days, Sri Ramakrishna entered again and again into communion with the Divine Mother. He said to the devotees : "God alone exists, and all else is unreal. The Divine Mother has kept all deluded by Her maya. Look at men. Most of them are entangled in worldliness. They suffer so much, but still they have the same attachment to 'woman and gold'. The camel eats thorny shrubs, and blood gushes from its mouth ; still it will eat thorns. While suffering pain at the time of delivery, a woman says, 'Ah ! I shall never go to my husband again.' But afterwards she forgets.

"The truth is that no one seeks God. There are people who eat the prickly leaves of the pineapple and not the fruit."

• DEVOTEE : "Sir, why has God put us in the world ?"

MASTER : "The world is the field of action. Through action one acquires knowledge. The guru instructs the disciple to perform certain works and refrain from others. Again, he advises the pupil to perform action without desiring the result. The impurity of the mind is destroyed through the performance of duty. It is like getting rid of a disease by means of medicine, under the instruction of a competent physician."

"Why doesn't God free us from the world ? Ah, He will free us when the disease is cured. He will liberate us from the world when we are through with the enjoyment of 'woman and gold'. Once a man registers his name in the hospital, he cannot run away. The doctor will not let him go away unless his illness is completely cured."

During these days Sri Ramakrishna's heart overflowed with motherly love like the love Yasoda felt for Krishna. So he kept Rakhal with him. Rakhal felt toward the Master as a child feels toward its mother. He would sit leaning on the Master's lap as a young child leans on its mother while sucking her breast.

Rakhal was thus seated by the Master when a man entered the room and said that a high tide was coming in the Ganges. The Master and the devotees ran to the Panchavati to see it. At the sight of a boat being tossed by the tide, Sri Ramakrishna exclaimed : "Look ! Look ! I hope nothing happens to it."

They all sat in the Panchavati. The Master asked M. to explain the cause of the tide. M. drew on the ground the figures of the sun, moon, and earth and tried to explain gravitation, ebb-tide, flood-tide, new moon, full moon, eclipse, and so forth.

MASTER (to M.) : "Stop it ! I can't follow you. It makes me dizzy. My head is aching. Well, how can they know of things so far off ?

"You see, during my childhood I could paint well ; but arithmetic would make my head spin. I couldn't learn simple arithmetic."

Sri Ramakrishna returned to his room with the devotees. Looking at a picture of Yasoda, on the wall, he said : "It is not well done. She looks like a garland-seller."

The Master enjoyed a nap after his noon meal. Adhar and other devotees gradually gathered. This was Adhar's first visit. He was a deputy magistrate and about thirty years old.

ADHAR (to the Master) : "I have a question to ask. Is it good to sacrifice animals before the Deity ? It certainly involves killing."

MASTER : "The sastra prescribes sacrifice on special occasions. Such sacrifice is not harmful. Take, for instance, the sacrifice of a goat on the eighth day of the full or new moon.

"I am now in such a state of mind that I cannot watch a sacrifice. Also I cannot eat meat offered to the Divine Mother. Therefore I first touch my finger to it, then to my head, lest She should be angry with me.

"Again, in a certain state of mind I see God in all beings, even in an ant. At that time, if I see a living being die, I find consolation in the thought that it is the death of the body, the soul being beyond life and death."

"One should not reason too much ; it is enough if one loves the Lotus Feet of the Mother. Too much reasoning throws the mind into confusion. You get clear water if you drink from the surface of a pool. Put your hand deeper and stir the water, and it becomes muddy. Therefore pray to God for devotion.

"Behind Dhruva's devotion there was desire. He practised austerities to gain his father's kingdom. But Prahlada's love for God was motiveless—a love that sought no return."

A DEVOTEE : "How can one realize God ?"

MASTER : "Through that kind of love. But one must force one's demand on God. One should be able to say : 'O God, wilt Thou not reveal Thyself to me ? I will cut my throat with a knife.' This is the tamas of bhakti."

DEVOTEE : "Can one see God ?"

MASTER : "Yes, surely. One can see both aspects of God—God with form and without form. One can see God with form, the Embodiment of Spirit. Again, God can be directly perceived in a man with ■ tangible form. Seeing an Incarnation of God is the same as seeing God Himself. God is born on earth as man in every age."

March 11, 1883

It was Sri Ramakrishna's birthday. Many of his disciples and devotees wanted to celebrate the happy occasion at the Dakshineswar temple garden.

From early morning the devotees streamed in, alone or in parties. After the morning worship in the temples sweet music was played in the nahabat. It was springtime. The trees, creepers, and plants were covered with new leaves and blossoms. The very air seemed laden with joy. And the hearts of the devotees were glad on this auspicious day.

M. arrived early in the morning and found the Master talking smilingly to Bhavanath, Rakhal, and Kalikrishna. M. prostrated himself before him.

MASTER (to M.) : "I am glad you have come.

(To the devotees) "One cannot be spiritual as long as one has shame, hatred, or fear. Great will be the joy today. But those fools who will not sing or dance, mad with God's name, will never attain God. How can one feel any shame or fear when the names of God are sung ? Now sing, all of you."

Bhavanath and his friend Kalikrishna sang :

Thrice blessed is this day of joy !
 May all of us unite, O Lord,
 To preach Thy true religion here
 In India's holy land !
 Thou dwellest in each human heart ;
 Thy name, resounding everywhere,
 Fills the four corners of the sky.
 Today Thy devotees proclaim
 Thy boundless majesty.

We seek not wealth or friends or fame,
 O Lord ! No other hope is ours.
 For Thee alone Thy devotees
 Long with unflagging love.

- Safe at Thy feet, what fear have we
Of death or danger ? We have found
The Fount of Immortality.
To Thee the victory, O Lord !
To Thee the victory !

As Sri Ramakrishna listened to the song with folded hands, his mind soared to a far-off realm. He remained absorbed in meditation a long time. After a while Kalikrishna whispered something to Bhavanath. Then he bowed before the Master and rose. Sri Ramakrishna was surprised. He asked, "Where are you going ?"

BHAVANATH : "He is going away on a little business."

MASTER : "What is it about ?"

BHAVANATH : "He is going to the Baranagore Workingmen's Institute."

MASTER : "It's his bad luck. A stream of bliss will flow here today. He could have enjoyed it. But how unlucky !"

Sri Ramakrishna did not feel well ; so he decided not to bathe in the Ganges. About nine o'clock a few jars of water were taken from the river, and with the help of the devotees he finished his bath on the verandah east of his room.

After bathing, the Master put on a new wearing-cloth, all the while chanting the name of God. Accompanied by one or two disciples he walked across the courtyard to the temple of Kali, still chanting Her hallowed name. His eyes had an indrawn look, like that of a bird hatching her eggs.

On entering the temple, he prostrated himself before the image and worshipped the Divine Mother. But he did not observe any ritual of worship. Now he would offer flowers and sandal-paste at the feet of the image, and now he would put them on his own head. After finishing the worship in his own way, he asked Bhavanath to carry the green coconut that had been offered to the Mother. He also visited the images of Radha and Krishna in the Vishnu temple.

When the Master returned to his room, he found that other devotees had arrived, among them Ram, Nityagopal, and Kedar. They all saluted the Master, who greeted them cordially.

He asked Nityagopal, "Will you eat something now ?" "Yes", the devotee answered. Nityagopal, who was twenty-three or twenty-four years old and unmarried, was like a child. His mind was always soaring in the spiritual realm. He visited the Master sometimes alone and sometimes in Ram's company. The Master had observed the spiritual state of his mind and had become very fond of him. He remarked now and then that Nityagopal was in the state of a paramahansa.

After Nityagopal had finished eating, the Master took him aside and gave him various instructions.

A certain woman, about thirty-one years old and a great devotee, often visited Sri Ramakrishna and held him in high respect. She had been much impressed by Nityagopal's spiritual state and, looking upon him as her own son, often invited him to her house.

MASTER (*to Nityagopal*) : "Do you go there ?"

NITYAGOPAL (*like a child*) : "Yes, I do. She takes me."

MASTER : "Beware, holy man ! Go there once in a great while, but not frequently ; otherwise you will slip from the ideal. Maya is nothing but 'woman and gold'. A holy man must live away from woman. All sink there. Even Brahma and Vishnu struggle for life in that whirlpool."

Nityagopal listened to these words attentively.

M. (*to himself*) : "How strange ! This young man has developed the state of a paramahansa. That is what the Master says now and then. Is there still a possibility of his falling into danger in spite of his high spiritual state ? What an austere rule is laid down for a sadhu ! He may slip from his ideal by associating intimately with women. How can an ordinary man expect to attain liberation unless such a high ideal is set by holy men ? The woman in question is very devout ; but still there is danger. Now I understand why Chaitanya punished his disciple, the younger Haridas, so severely. In spite of his teacher's prohibition, Haridas, conversed with a widow devotee. But he was a sannyasi. Therefore Chaitanya banished him. What a severe punishment ! How hard is the rule for one who has accepted the life of renunciation ! Again, what love the Master cherishes for this devotee ! He is warning him even now, lest he should run into danger in the future."

"Beware, holy man !" These words of the Master echoed in the hearts of the devotees, like the distant rumbling of thunder.

The Master went with the devotees to the northeast verandah of his room. Among them was a householder from the village of Dakshineswar, who studied Vedanta philosophy at home. He had been discussing Om with Kedar before the Master. He said, "This Eternal Word, the Anahata Sabda, is ever present both within and without."

MASTER : "But the Word is not enough. There must be something indicated by the Word. Can your name alone make me happy ? Complete happiness is not possible for me unless I see you."

DEVOTEE : "That Eternal Word itself is Brahman."

MASTER (*to Kedar*) : "Oh, don't you understand ? He upholds the doctrine of the rishis of olden times. They once said to Rama : 'O Rama, we know You only as the son of Dasaratha. Let sages like Bharadvaja worship You as God Incarnate. We want to realize Brahman, the Indivisible Existence-Knowledge-Bliss Absolute.' At these words Rama smiled and went away."

KEDAR : "Those rishis could not recognize Rama as an Incarnation of God. They must have been fools."

MASTER (*seriously*) : "Please don't say such a thing. People worship God according to their tastes and temperaments. The mother cooks the same fish differently for her children, that each one may have what suits his stomach. For some she cooks the rich dish of pilau. But not all the children can digest it. For those with weak stomachs she prepares soup. Some, again, like fried fish or pickled fish. It depends on one's taste."

"The rishis followed the path of jnana. Therefore they sought to realize Brahman, the Indivisible Existence-Knowledge-Bliss Absolute. But those who

follow the path of devotion seek an Incarnation of God, to enjoy the sweetness of bhakti. The darkness of the mind disappears when God is realized. In the Purana it is said that it was as if a hundred suns were shining when Rama entered the court. Why, then, weren't the courtiers burnt up? It was because the brilliance of Rama was not like that of a material object. As the lotus blooms when the sun rises, so the lotus of the heart of the people assembled in the court burst into blossom."

As the Master uttered these words, standing before the devotees, he suddenly fell into an ecstatic mood. His mind was withdrawn from external objects. No sooner did he say, "the lotus of the heart burst into blossom", than he went into deep samadhi. He stood motionless, his countenance beaming and his lips parted in a smile.

After a long time he returned to the normal consciousness of the world. He drew a long breath and repeatedly chanted the name of Rama, every word showering nectar into the hearts of the devotees. The Master sat down, the others seating themselves around him. 1-6-4

MASTER (*to the devotees*) : "Ordinary people do not recognize the advent of an Incarnation of God. He comes in secret. Only a few of His intimate disciples can recognize Him. That Rama was both Brahman Absolute and a perfect Incarnation of God in human form was known only to twelve rishis. The other sages said to Him, 'Rama, we know You only as Dasaratha's son.'

"Can everyone comprehend Brahman, the Indivisible Existence-Knowledge-Bliss Absolute? He alone has attained perfect love of God who, having reached the Absolute, keeps himself in the realm of the Relative in order to enjoy the divine lila. A man can describe the ways and activities of the Queen¹ if he has previously visited her in England. Only then will his description of the Queen be correct. Sages like Bharadvaja adored Rama and said: 'O Rama, You are nothing but the Indivisible Satchidananda. You have appeared before us as a human being, but You look like a man because You have shrouded Yourself with Your own maya.' These rishis were great devotees of Rama and had supreme love for God."

Presently some devotees from Konnagar arrived, singing kirtan to the accompaniment of drums and cymbals. As they reached the northeast verandah of Sri Ramakrishna's room, the Master joined in the music, dancing with them intoxicated with divine joy. Now and then he went into samadhi, standing still as a statue. While he was in one of these states of divine unconsciousness, the devotees put thick garlands of jasmine around his neck. The enchanting form of the Master reminded the devotees of Chaitanya, another Incarnation of God. The Master passed alternately through three moods of divine consciousness: the inmost, when he completely lost all knowledge of the outer world; the semi-conscious, when he danced with the devotees in an ecstasy of love; and the conscious, when he joined them in loud singing. It was indeed a sight for the gods, to see the Master standing motionless in samadhi, with fragrant garlands hanging from

¹ Queen Victoria.

his neck, his countenance beaming with love, and the devotees singing and dancing around him.

When it was time for his noon meal, Sri Ramakrishna put on a new yellow cloth and sat on the small couch. His golden complexion, blending with his yellow cloth, enchanted the eyes of the devotees.

After his meal Sri Ramakrishna rested a little on the small couch. Inside and outside his room crowded the devotees, among them Kedar, Suresh, Ram, Manomohan, Girindra, Rakhal, Bhavanath, and M. Rakhal's father was also present.

A Vaishnava goswami was seated in the room. The Master said to him : " Well, what do you say ? What is the way ? "

GOSWAMI : " Sir, the chanting of God's name is enough. The scriptures emphasize the sanctity of God's name for the Kaliyuga."

MASTER : " Yes, there is no doubt about the sanctity of God's name. But can a mere name achieve anything, without the yearning love of the devotee behind it ? One should feel great restlessness of soul for the vision of God. Suppose a man repeats the name of God mechanically, while his mind is absorbed in ' woman and gold '. Can he achieve anything ? Mere muttering of magic words doesn't cure one of the pain of a spider or scorpion sting. One must also apply the smoke of burning cow-dung.⁵"

GOSWAMI : " But what about Ajamila then ? He was a great sinner ; there was no sin he had not indulged in. But he uttered the name of Narayana on his death-bed, calling his son, who also had that name. And thus he was liberated."

MASTER : " Perhaps Ajamila had done many spiritual things in his past births. It is also said that he once practised austerity ; besides, those were the last moments of his life. What is the use of giving an elephant a bath ? It will cover itself with dirt and dust again and become its former self. But if someone removes the dust from its body and gives it a bath just before it enters the stable, then the elephant remains clean.

" Suppose a man becomes pure by chanting the holy name of God, but immediately afterwards commits many sins. He has no strength of mind. He doesn't take a vow not to repeat his sins. A bath in the Ganges undoubtedly absolves one of all sins ; but what does that avail ? They say that the sins perch on the trees along the bank of the Ganges. No sooner does the man come back from the holy waters than the old sins jump on his shoulders from the trees. (*All laugh.*) The same old sins take possession of him again. He is hardly out of the water before they fall upon him.

" Therefore I say, chant the name of God, and with it pray to Him that you may have love for Him. Pray to God that your attachment to such transitory things as wealth, name, and creature comforts may become less and less every day.

(To the goswami) " With sincerity and earnestness one can realize God through all religions. The Vaishnavas will realize God, and so will the Saktas, the Vedantists, and the Brahmos. The Mussalmans and Christians

⁵ A primitive medicine used by the villagers for scorpion sting.

will realize Him too. All will certainly realize God if they are earnest and sincere.

"Some people indulge in quarrels, saying, 'One cannot attain anything unless one worships our Krishna', or, 'Nothing can be gained without the worship of Kali, our Divine Mother', or, 'One cannot be saved without accepting the Christian religion.' This is pure dogmatism. The dogmatist says, 'My religion alone is true, and the religions of others are false.' This is a bad attitude. God can be reached by different paths.

"Further, some say that God has form and is not formless. Thus they start quarrelling. A Vaishnava quarrels with a Vedantist.

"One can rightly speak of God only after one has seen Him. He who has seen God knows really and truly that God has form and that He is formless as well. He has many other aspects that cannot be described.

"Once some blind men chanced to come near an animal that someone told them was an elephant. They were asked what the elephant was like. The blind men began to feel its body. One of them said the elephant was like a pillar; he had touched only its leg. Another said it was like a winnowing-fan; he had touched only its ear. In this way the others, having touched its tail or belly, gave their different versions of the elephant. Just so, a man who has seen only one aspect of God limits God to that alone. It is his conviction that God cannot be anything else.

(To the goswami) "How can you say that the only truth about God is that He has form? It is undoubtedly true that God comes down to earth in a human form, as in the case of Krishna. And it is true as well that God reveals Himself to His devotees in various forms. But it is also true that God is formless; He is the Indivisible Existence-Knowledge-Bliss Absolute. He has been described in the Vedas both as formless and as endowed with form. He is also described there both as attributeless and as endowed with attributes.

"Do you know what I mean? Satchidananda is like an infinite ocean. Intense cold freezes the water into ice, which floats on the ocean in blocks of various forms. Likewise, through the cooling influence of bhakti, one sees forms of God in the Ocean of the Absolute. These forms are meant for the bhaktas, the lovers of God. But when the Sun of Knowledge rises, the ice melts; it becomes the same water it was before. Water above and water below, everywhere nothing but water. Therefore a prayer in the *Bhagavata* says: 'O Lord, Thou hast form, and Thou art also formless. Thou walkest before us, O Lord, in the shape of a man; again, Thou hast been described in the Vedas as beyond words and thought.'

"But you may say that for certain devotees God assumes eternal forms. There are places in the ocean where the ice doesn't melt at all. It assumes the form of quartz."

KEDAR: "It is said in the *Bhagavata* that Vyasa asked God's forgiveness for his three transgressions. He said: 'O Lord, Thou art formless, but I have thought of Thee in my meditation as endowed with form; Thou art beyond speech, but I have sung Thee hymns; Thou art the All-pervading Spirit.'

but I have made pilgrimages to sacred places. Be gracious, O Lord, and forgive these three transgressions of mine."

MASTER : "Yes, God has form and He is formless too. Further, He is beyond both form and formlessness. No one can limit Him."

Rakhal's father was sitting in the room. At that time Rakhal was staying with the Master. After his mother's death his father had married a second time. Now and then he came to Dakshineswar because of Rakhal's being there. He did not raise much objection to his son's living with the Master. Being a wealthy man of the world, he was always involved in litigation. There were lawyers and deputy magistrates among Sri Ramakrishna's visitors. Rakhal's father found it profitable to cultivate their acquaintance, since he expected to be benefited by their counsels in worldly matters.

Now and then the Master cast a glance at Rakhal's father. It was his cherished desire that Rakhal should live with him permanently at Dakshineswar.

MASTER (*to Rakhal's father and the devotees*) : "Ah, what a nice character Rakhal has developed! Look at his face and every now and then you will notice his lips moving. Inwardly he repeats the name of God, and so his lips move.

"Youngsters like him belong to the class of the ever-perfect. They are born with God-Consciousness. No sooner do they grow a little older than they realize the danger of coming in contact with the world. There is the parable of the homa bird in the Vedas. The bird lives high up in the sky and never descends to earth. It lays its egg in the sky, and the egg begins to fall. But the bird lives in such a high region that the egg hatches while falling. The fledgling comes out and continues to fall. But it is still so high that while falling it grows wings and its eyes open. Then the young bird perceives that it is dashing down toward the earth and will be instantly killed. The moment it sees the ground, it turns and shoots up toward its mother in the sky. Then its one goal is to reach its mother.

"Youngsters like Rakhal are like that bird. From their very childhood they are afraid of the world, and their one thought is how to reach the Mother, how to realize God.

"You may ask, 'How is it possible for these boys, born of worldly parents and living among the worldly-minded, to develop such knowledge and devotion?' It can be explained. If a pea falls into a heap of dung, it germinates into a pea-plant none the less. The peas that grow on that plant serve many useful purposes. Because it was sown in dung, will it produce another kind of plant?

"Ah, what a sweet nature Rakhal has nowadays! And why shouldn't it be so? If the yam is a good one, its shoots also become good. (*All laugh.*) Like father like son."

M. (*aside to Girindra*) : "How well he has explained God with and without form! Do the Vaishnavas believe only in God with form?"

GIRINDRA : "Perhaps so. They are one-sided."

M : "Did you understand what he meant by the 'eternal form' of God? That 'quartz'? I couldn't grasp it well."

* MASTER (to M.) : " Well, what are you talking about ? "

M. and Girindra smiled and remained silent.

Later in the afternoon the devotees were singing in the Panchavati, where the Master joined them. They sang together in praise of the Divine Mother :

High in the heaven of the Mother's feet, my mind was soaring like a kite,

When came a blast of sin's rough wind that drove it swiftly toward the earth.

Maya disturbed its even flight by bearing down upon one side,
And I could make it rise no more.

Entangled in the twisting string of love for children and for wife,
Alas ! my kite was rent in twain.

It lost its crest of wisdom soon and downward plunged as
I let it go ;

How could it hope to fly again, when all its top was torn away ?
Though fastened with devotion's cord, it came to grief in play-ing here ;

Its six opponents⁵ worsted it.

Now Nareschandra rues this game of smiles and tears, and thinks
it better

Never to have played at all.

The singing continued. Sri Ramakrishna danced with the devotees.
They sang :

The black bee of my mind is drawn in sheer delight
To the blue lotus flower of Mother Syama's feet,
The blue flower of the feet of Kali, Siva's Consort :
Tasteless, to the bee, are the blossoms of desire.
My Mother's feet are black, and black, too, is the bee ;
Black is made one with black ! This much of the mystery
My mortal eyes behold, then hastily retreat,
But Kamalakanta's hopes are answered in the end :
He swims in the Sea of Bliss, unmoved by joy or pain.

The kirtan went on :

O Mother, what a machine⁶ is this that Thou hast made !
What pranks Thou playest with this toy
Three and a half cubits high !
Hiding Thyself within, Thou holdest the guiding string ;
But the machine, not knowing it,
Still believes it moves by itself.
Whoever finds the Mother remains a machine no more ; /
Yet some machines have even bound
The Mother Herself with the string of Love.

It was a very happy day for all.

The Master, accompanied by M., was coming back to his room, when he met Trailokya, a Brahmo devotee, on the way. Trailokya bowed before the Master.

⁵ The six passions.

⁶ The human body.

MASTER : " They are singing in the Panchavati. Won't you go there ? "

TRAILOKYA : " What shall I do there ? "

MASTER : " Why, you will enjoy the music."

TRAILOKYA : " I have been there already."

MASTER : " Well, well ! That's good."

It was about six o'clock in the evening. The Master was sitting with the devotees on the southeast verandah of his room.

MASTER : " A holy man who has renounced the world will of course chant the name of God. That is only natural. He has no other duties to perform. If he meditates on God it shouldn't surprise anybody. On the other hand, if he fails to think of God or chant His holy name, then people will think ill of him.

" But it is a great deal to his credit if a householder utters the name of the Lord. Think of King Janaka. What courage he had, indeed ! He fenced with two swords, the one of Knowledge and the other of work. He possessed the perfect Knowledge of Brahman and also was devoted to the duties of the world. An unchaste woman attends to the minutest duties of the world, but her mind always dwells on her paramour.

" The constant company of holy men is necessary. The holy man introduces one to God."

KEDAR : " Yes, sir. The great soul is born in the world for the redemption of humanity. He leads others to God, just as a locomotive engine takes along with it a long train of carriages. Or again, he is like a river or lake that quenches the thirst of many people."

The devotees were ready to return home. One by one they saluted the Master. At the sight of Bhavanath Sri Ramakrishna said : " Don't go away today. The very sight of you inspires me." Bhavanath had not yet entered into worldly life. A youth of twenty, he had a fair complexion and handsome features. He shed tears of joy on hearing the name of God. The Master looked on him as the embodiment of Narayana.

Thursday, March 29, 1883

The Master had taken a little rest after his noon meal, when a few devotees arrived from Calcutta, among them Amrita and the well-known singer of the Brahmo Samaj, Trailokya.

Rakhal was not feeling well. The Master was greatly worried about him and said to the devotees : " You see, Rakhal is not well. Will soda-water help him ? What am I to do now ? Rakhal, please take the prasad from the Jagannath temple."

Even as he spoke these words the Master underwent a strange transformation. He looked at Rakhal with the infinite tenderness of a mother and affectionately uttered the name of Govinda.¹ Did he see in Rakhal the manifestation of God Himself ? The disciple was a young boy of pure heart who had renounced all attraction to lust and greed. And Sri Ramakrishna was intoxicated

¹ A name of Krishna. According to the Master, Rakhal, in one of his previous incarnations, had been a cowherd of Vrindavan and an intimate companion of Sri Krishna.

day and night with love of God. At the sight of Rakhal his eyes expressed the tender feelings of a mother, a love like that which had filled the heart of Mother Yasoda at the sight of the Baby Krishna. The devotees gazed at the Master in wonder as he went into deep samadhi. As his soul soared into the realm of Divine Consciousness, his body became motionless, his eyes were fixed on the tip of his nose, and his breathing almost ceased.

An unknown Bengali, dressed in the ochre cloth of a monk, entered the room and sat on the floor. The Master's mind was coming down to the ordinary plane of consciousness. Presently he began to talk, though the spell of samadhi still lingered.

MASTER (*at the sight of the ochre cloth*) : "Why this gerrua? Should one put on such a thing for a mere fancy? A man once said, 'I have exchanged the *Chandi* for a drum.' At first he used to sing the holy songs of the *Chandi*; now he beats the drum. (All laugh.)

"There are three or four varieties of renunciation. Afflicted with miseries at home, one may put on the ochre cloth of a monk; but that renunciation doesn't last long. Again, a man out of work puts on an ochre wearing-cloth and goes off to Benares. After three months he writes home: 'I have a job here. I shall come home in a few days. Don't worry about me.' Again, a man may have everything he wants. He lacks nothing, yet he does not enjoy his possessions. He weeps for God alone. That is real renunciation.

"No lie of any sort is good. A false garb, even though a holy one, is not good. If the outer garb does not correspond to the inner thought, it gradually brings ruin. Uttering false words or doing false deeds, one gradually loses all fear. Far better is the white cloth of a householder. Attachment to worldliness, occasional lapses from the ideal, and an outer garb of gerrua—how dreadful!

"It is not proper for a righteous person to tell a lie or do something false even in a dramatic performance. Once I went to Keshab's house to see the performance of a play called *Nava-Vrindavan*. They brought something on the stage which they called the 'Cross.' Another actor sprinkled water, which they said was the 'Water of Peace'. I saw a third actor staggering and reeling in the role of a drunkard."

A BRAHMO DEVOTEE : "It was K—."

MASTER : "It is not good for a devotee to play such parts. It is bad for the mind to dwell on such subjects for a long while. The mind is like white linen fresh from the laundry; it takes the colour in which you dip it. If it is associated with falsehood for a long time, it will be stained with falsehood.

"Another day I went to Keshab's house to see the play called *Nimai-sannyas*.² Some flattering disciples of Keshab spoiled the whole performance. One of them said to Keshab, 'You are the Chaitanya of the Kaliyuga.' Keshab pointed to me and asked with a smile, 'Then who is he?' I replied: 'Why, I am the servant of your servant. I am a speck of the dust of your feet.' Keshab had a desire for name and fame.

² A play describing Sri Chaitanya's embracing of the monastic life.

(To Amrita and Trailokya) "Youngsters like Narendra and Rakhal are ever-perfect. Every time they are born they are devoted to God. An ordinary man acquires a little devotion after austerities and a hard struggle. But these boys have love of God from the very moment of their birth. They are like the natural image of Siva, which springs forth from the earth and is not set up by human hands.

"The ever-perfect form a class by themselves. Not all birds have crooked beaks. The ever-perfect are never attached to the world. There is the instance of Prahlada.

"Ordinary people practise spiritual discipline and cultivate devotion to God; but they also become attached to the world and are caught in the glamour of 'woman and gold'. They are like flies, which sit on a flower or a sweetmeat and light on filth as well.

"But the ever-perfect are like bees, which light only on flowers and sip the honey. The ever-perfect drink only the Nectar of Divine Bliss. They are never inclined to worldly pleasures.

"The devotion of the ever-perfect is not like the ordinary devotion that one acquires as a result of strenuous spiritual discipline. Ritualistic devotion consists in repeating the name of God and performing worship in a prescribed manner. It is like crossing a rice-field in a roundabout way along the balk. Again, it is like reaching a near-by village by boat in a roundabout way along a winding river.

"One does not follow the injunctions of ceremonial worship when one develops raga-bhakti, when one loves God as one's own. Then it is like crossing a rice-field after the harvest. You don't have to walk along the balk. You can go straight across the field in any direction.

"When the country is flooded deep with water, one doesn't have to follow the winding river. Then the fields are deep under water. You can row your boat straight to the village.

"Without this intense attachment, this passionate love, one cannot realize God."

AMRITA : "Sir, how do you feel in samadhi ?"

MASTER : "You may have heard that the cockroach, by intently meditating on the bhramara, is transformed into a bhramara. Do you know how I feel then ? I feel like a fish released from a pot into the water of the Ganges."

AMRITA : "Don't you feel at that time even a trace of ego ?"

MASTER : "Yes, generally a little of it remains. However hard you may rub a grain of gold against a grindstone, still a bit of it always remains. Or again, take the case of a big fire; the ego is like one of its sparks. In samadhi I lose outer consciousness completely; but God generally keeps a little trace of ego in me for the enjoyment of divine communion. Enjoyment is possible only when 'I' and 'you' remain."

"Again, sometimes God effaces even that trace of 'I'. Then one experiences jada samadhi or nirvikalpa samadhi. That experience cannot be described. A salt doll went to measure the depth of the ocean, but before it had gone far into the water it melted away. It became entirely one with the water of the ocean. Then who was to come back and tell the ocean's depth ?"

IX

ADVICE TO THE BRAHMOS

Saturday, April 7, 1883

SRI RAMAKRISHNA was visiting Balaram in Calcutta, with Narendra, Bhavarnath, Rakhal, M., and others. Balaram, at the Master's bidding, had invited some of the young devotees to lunch. Sri Ramakrishna often said to him, "Feed them now and then; that will confer on you the merit of feeding holy men." The Master looked on his young disciples, yet untouched by "woman and gold", as veritable embodiments of God.

A few days earlier Sri Ramakrishna had been to Keshab's house with Narendra and Rakhal to see a performance of the play entitled *Nava-Vrindavan*. Narendra had taken part in the performance, in which Keshab had played the role of Pavhari Baba.

MASTER : "Keshab came on the stage in the role of a holy man and sprinkled the 'Water of Peace'. But I didn't like it. The idea of sprinkling such water on a theatrical stage after a performance !

"Another gentleman played the part of Sin. That is not good either. One should not commit sin; one should not even feign it."

The Master wanted to hear Narendra sing. The young disciple was not feeling well, but at the Master's earnest request he sang to the accompaniment of the tanpura :

Sing, O bird that nestles deep within my heart !
Sing, O bird that sits on the Kalpa-Tree of Brahman !
Sing God's everlasting praise. . . .

Then he sang :

Brahman, Joy of the whole universe, Supreme Effulgence ;
God beginningless, Lord of the world, the very Life of life ! . . .

And again :

O King of Kings, reveal Thyself to me !
I crave Thy mercy. Cast on me Thy glance !
At Thy dear feet I dedicate my life,
Seared in the fiery furnace of this world.

My heart, alas, is deeply stained with sin :
Ensnared in maya, I am all but dead.

Compassionate Lord ! Revive my fainting soul
With the life-giving nectar of Thy grace.

Narendra continued :

Upon the tray of the sky blaze bright
The lamps of sun and moon ;
Like diamonds shine the glittering stars
To deck Thy wondrous form.
The sweet Malaya breeze blows soft,
For fragrant incense smoke ;
The moving air sways to and fro
The fan before Thy holy face ;
Like gleaming votive lights
The fresh and flowery groves appear.

How wonderful Thy worship is,
O Slayer of birth and death !
The sacred Om, from space arisen,
Is the resounding drum.
My mind craves nectar day and night
At Hari's Lotus Feet ;
Oh, shower the waters of Thy grace
On thirsty Nanak, blessed Lord ;
And may Thy hallowed name
Become his everlasting home !

He sang again :

In Wisdom's firmament the moon of Love is rising full,
And Love's flood-tide, in surging waves, is flowing everywhere.
O Lord, how full of bliss Thou art ! Victory unto Thee ! . . .

Then at the Master's bidding Bhavanath sang :

Where is a friend like Thee, O Essence of Mercy ?
Where is another friend like Thee
To stand by me through pain and pleasure ?
Who, among all my friends, forgives my failings,
Bringing me comfort for my grief,
Soothing my spirit in its terror ?

Thou art the Helmsman who dost steer life's craft
Across the world's perilous sea :
Thy grace it is alone, O Lord,
That silences my raging passions' storm.
Thou pourest out the waters of peace
Upon my burning, penitent soul ;
And Thine is the bosom that will shelter me
When every other friend I own
Deserts me in my dying hour.

Narendra said to the Master with a smile, referring to Bhavanath, " He has given up fish and betel-leaf."¹

¹ Hindu religious aspirants often renounce these, since they are considered luxuries detrimental to spiritual progress.

• MASTER : " Why so ? What is the matter with fish and betel-leaf ? They aren't harmful. The renunciation of ' woman and gold ' is the true renunciation.

" Where is Rakhal ? "

A DEVOTEE : " He is asleep, sir."

MASTER (*with a smile*) : " Once a man went to a certain place to see a theatrical performance, carrying a mat under his arm. Hearing that it would be some time before the performance began, he spread the mat on the floor and fell asleep. When he woke up it was all over. (*All laugh.*) Then he returned home with the mat under his arm."

Ramdayal was very ill and lay in bed in another room. The Master went there to inquire about him.

About four o'clock in the afternoon some members of the Brahmo Samaj arrived. The Master began to converse with them.

A BRAHMO : " Sir, have you read the *Panchadasi* ? "

MASTER : " At first one should hear books like that and indulge in reasoning. But later on—

Cherish my precious Mother Syama
Tenderly within, O mind ;
May you and I alone behold Her,
Letting no one else intrude.

" One should hear the scriptures during the early stages of spiritual discipline. After attaining God there is no lack of knowledge. Then the Divine Mother supplies it without fail.

" A child spells out every word as he writes, but later on he writes fluently.

" The goldsmith is up and doing while melting gold. As long as the gold hasn't melted, he works the bellows with one hand, moves the fan with the other, and blows through a pipe with his mouth. But the moment the gold melts and is poured into the mould, he is relieved of all anxiety.

" Mere reading of the scriptures is not enough. A person cannot understand the true significance of the scriptures if he is attached to the world.

Though with intense delight I learnt many poems and dramas,
I have forgotten them all, entrapped in Krishna's love.

" Keshab enjoys the world and practises yoga as well. Living in the world, he directs his mind to God."

A devotee described the Convocation of Calcutta University, saying that the meeting looked like a forest of human heads.

MASTER : " The feeling of the Divine is awakened in me when I see a great crowd of people. Had I seen that meeting, I should have been overwhelmed with spiritual fervour."

Sunday, April 8, 1883

It was Sunday morning. The Master, looking like a boy, was seated in his room, and near him was another boy, his beloved disciple Rakhal.

M. entered and saluted the Master. Ramlal also was in the room, and Kishori, Manilal Mallick, and several other devotees gathered by and by.

Manilal Mallick, a business man, had recently been to Benares, where he owned a bungalow.

MASTER : "So you have been to Benares. Did you see any holy men there ?"

MANILAL : "Yea, sir. I paid my respects to Trailinga Swami, Bhaskarananda, and others."

MASTER : "Tell us something about them."

MANILAL : "Trailinga Swami is living in the same temple where he lived before—on the Manikarnika Ghat, near the Benimadhav Minaret. People say he was formerly in a more exalted spiritual state. He could perform many miracles. Now he has lost much of that power."

MASTER : "That is the criticism of worldly people."

MANILAL : "Trailinga Swami keeps a strict vow of silence. Unlike him, Bhaskarananda is friendly with all."

MASTER : "Did you have any conversation with Bhaskarananda ?"

MANILAL : "Yes, sir. We had a long talk. Among other things we discussed the problem of good and evil. He said to me : 'Don't follow the path of evil. Give up sinful thoughts. That is how God wants us to act. Perform only those duties that are virtuous.'"

MASTER : "Yes, that is also a path, meant for worldly-minded people. But those whose spiritual consciousness has been awakened, who have realized that God alone is real and all else illusory, cherish a different ideal. They are aware that God alone is the Doer and others are His instruments."

"Those whose spiritual consciousness has been awakened never make a false step. They do not have to reason in order to shun evil. They are so full of love of God that whatever action they undertake is a good action. They are fully conscious that they are not the doers of their actions, but mere servants of God. They always feel : 'I am the machine and He is the Operator. I do as He does through me. I speak as He speaks through me. I move as He moves me.'

"Fully awakened souls are beyond virtue and vice. They realize that it is God who does everything."

"There was a monastery in a certain place. The monks residing there went out daily to beg their food. One day a monk, while out for his alms, saw a landlord beating a man mercilessly. The compassionate monk stepped in and asked the landlord to stop. But the landlord was filled with anger and turned his wrath against the innocent monk. He beat the monk till he fell unconscious on the ground. Someone reported the matter to the monastery. The monks ran to the spot and found their brother lying there. Four or five of them carried him back and laid him on a bed. He was still unconscious. The other monks sat around him sad at heart; some were fanning him. Finally someone suggested that he should be given a little milk to drink. When it was poured into his mouth he regained consciousness. He opened his eyes and looked around. One of the monks said, 'Let us see whether he [

is fully conscious and can recognize us.' Shouting into his ear, he said, 'Revered sir, who is giving you milk?' 'Brother,' replied the holy man in a low voice, 'He who beat me is now giving me milk.'

"But one does not attain such a state of mind without the realization of God."

MANILAL : "Sir, what you have just said applies to a man of a very lofty spiritual state. I talked on such topics in a general way with Bhaskarananda."

MASTER : "Does he live in a house?"

MANILAL : "Yes, sir. He lives with a devotee."

MASTER : "How old is he now?"

MANILAL : "About fifty-five."

MASTER : "Did you talk about anything else?"

MANILAL : "I asked him how to cultivate bhakti. He said : 'Chant the name of God. Repeat the name of Rama.'

MASTER : "That is very good."

The worship was over in the temples and the bells rang for the food offerings in the shrines. As it was a summer noon the sun was very hot. The flood-tide began in the Ganges and a breeze came up from the south. Sri Ramakrishna was resting in his room after his meal.

The people of Basirhat, Rakhal's birth-place, had been suffering from a severe drought during the summer months.

MASTER (*to Manilal*) : "Rakhal says that the people in his native village have been suffering seriously from a scarcity of water. Why don't you build a reservoir there? That will do the people good. (*Smiling*) You have so much money; what will you do with all your wealth? But they say that telis² are very calculating." (*All laugh.*)

Manilal was truly a calculating man, though he suffered no lack of money. In later years he set up an endowment of twenty-five thousand rupees for the maintenance of poor students.

Manilal made no answer to these words of the Master about his caste characteristics. Later on, in the course of the conversation, he remarked casually : "Sir, you referred to a reservoir. You might as well have confined yourself to that suggestion. Why allude to the 'oil-man caste' and all that?"

Some of the devotees smiled to themselves. The Master laughed.

Presently a few elderly members of the Brahmo Samaj arrived. The room was full of devotees. Sri Ramakrishna was sitting on his bed, facing the north. He kept smiling, and talked to the Brahmo devotees in a joyous mood.

MASTER : "You talk glibly about prema. But is it such a commonplace thing? There are two characteristics of prema. First, it makes one forget the world. So intense is one's love of God that one becomes unconscious of outer things. Chaitanya had this ecstatic love: he 'took a wood for the sacred grove of Vrindavan and the ocean for the dark waters of the Jamuna'. Second, one has no feeling of 'my-ness' toward the body, which is so dear to man. One wholly gets rid of the feeling that the body is the soul."

² The oil-man caste to which Manilal belonged. It is a comparatively low caste in Hindu society in Bengal.

"There are certain signs of God-realization. The man in whom longing for God manifests its glories is not far from attaining Him. What are the glories of that longing? They are discrimination, dispassion, compassion for living beings, serving holy men, loving their company, chanting the name and glories of God, telling the truth, and the like. When you see those signs of longing in an aspirant, you can rightly say that for him the vision of God is not far to seek."

"The state of a servant's house will tell you unmistakably whether his master has decided to visit it. First, the rubbish and jungle around the house are cleared up. Second, the soot and dirt are removed from the rooms. Third, the courtyard, floors, and other places are swept clean. Finally the master himself sends various things to the house, such as a carpet, a bubble-bubble for smoking, and the like. When you see these things arriving, you conclude that the master will very soon come."

A DEVOTEE : "Sir, should one first practise discrimination to attain self-control?"

MASTER : "That is also a path. It is called the path of vichara, reasoning. But the inner organs³ are brought under control naturally through the path of devotion as well. It is rather easily accomplished that way. Sense pleasures appear more and more tasteless as love for God grows. Can carnal pleasure attract a grief-stricken man and woman the day their child has died?"

DEVOTEE : "How can I develop love for God?"

MASTER : "Repeat His name, and sins will disappear. Thus you will destroy lust, anger, the desire for creature comforts, and so on."

DEVOTEE : "How can I take delight in God's name?"

MASTER : "Pray to God with a yearning heart that you may take delight in His name. He will certainly fulfil your heart's desire."

So saying, the Master sang a song in his sweet voice, pleading with the Divine Mother to show Her grace to suffering men :

O Mother, I have no one else to blame :
Alas! I sink in the well these very hands have dug.
With the six passions for my spade,
I dug a pit in the sacred land of earth ;
And now the dark water of death gushes forth !
How can I save myself, O my Redeemer ?

Surely I have been my own enemy ;
How can I now ward off this dark water of death ?
Behold, the waters rise to my chest !
How can I save myself ? O Mother, save me !
Thou art my only Refuge ; with Thy protecting glance
Take me across to the other shore of the world.

The Master sang again :

What a delirious fever is this that I suffer from !
O Mother, Thy grace is my only cure.
False pride is the fever that racks my wasted form ;
"I" and "mine" are my cry. Oh, what a wicked delusion !

³ Mind (manas), intelligence (buddhi), mind-stuff (chitta), and ego (ahamkara).

• My quenchless thirst for wealth and friends is never-ceasing ;
How, then, shall I sustain my life ?
Talk about things unreal, this is my wretched delirium,
And I indulge in it always, O Giver of all good fortune !

My eyes in seeming sleep are closed, my stomach is filled
With the vile worms of cruelty.
Alas ! I wander about absorbed in unmeaning deeds :
Even for Thy holy name I have no taste, O Mother !
I doubt that I shall ever be cured of this malady.

Then the Master said : " ' Even for Thy holy name I have no taste.' A typhoid patient has very little chance of recovery if he loses all taste for food ; but his life need not be despaired of if he enjoys food even a little. That is why one should cultivate a taste for God's name. Any name will do—Durga, Krishna, or Siva. Then if, through the chanting of the name, one's attachment to God grows day by day, and joy fills the soul, one has nothing to fear. The delirium will certainly disappear ; the grace of God will certainly descend.

" ' As is a man's feeling of love, so is his gain.' Once two friends were going along the street, when they saw some people listening to a reading of the *Bhagavata*. ' Come, friend ', said the one to the other. ' Let us hear the sacred book.' So saying he went in and sat down. The second man peeped in and went away. He entered a house of ill fame. But very soon he felt disgusted with the place. ' Shame on me ! ' he said to himself. ' My friend has been listening to the sacred word of Hari ; and see where I am ! ' But the friend who had been listening to the *Bhagavata* also became disgusted. ' What a fool I am ! ' he said. ' I have been listening to this fellow's blah-blah, and my friend is having a grand time.' In course of time they both died. The messenger of Death came for the soul of the one who had listened to the *Bhagavata* and dragged it off to hell. The messenger of God came for the soul of the one who had been to the house of prostitution and led it up to heaven.

" Verily, the Lord looks into a man's heart and does not judge him by what he does or where he lives. ' Krishna accepts a devotee's inner feeling of love.'

" In the Kartabhaja sect, the teacher, while giving initiation, says to the disciple, ' Now everything depends on your mind.' According to this sect, ' He who has the right mind finds the right way and also achieves the right end.' It was through the power of his mind that Hanuman leapt over the sea. ' I am the servant of Rama : I have repeated the holy name of Rama. Is there anything impossible for me ? '—that was Hanuman's faith.

" Ignorance lasts as long as one has ego. There can be no liberation so long as the ego remains. ' O God, Thou art the Doer and not I'—that is knowledge.

" By being lowly one can rise high. The chatak bird makes its nest on low ground, but it soars very high in the sky. Cultivation is not possible on high land ; in low land water accumulates and makes cultivation possible.

" One must take the trouble to seek the company of holy persons. In his own home a man hears only worldly talk ; the disease of worldliness has become

chronic with him. The caged parrot sitting on its perch repeats, 'Rama ! Rama !' But let it fly to the forest and it will squawk in its usual way.

"Mere possession of money doesn't make a nobleman. One sign of the mansion of a nobleman is that all the rooms are lighted. The poor cannot afford much oil, and consequently cannot have so many lights. This shrine of the body should not be left dark : one should illumine it with the lamp of Wisdom.

Lighting the lamp of Knowledge in the chamber of your heart,
Behold the face of the Mother, Brahman's Embodiment.

"Everyone can attain Knowledge. There are two entities : jivatma, the individual soul, and Paramatma, the Supreme Soul. Through prayer all individual souls can be united to the Supreme Soul. Every house has a connection for gas, and gas can be obtained from the main storage-tank of the Gas Company. Apply to the Company, and it will arrange for your supply of gas. Then your house will be lighted.

"In some people spiritual consciousness has already been awakened ; but they have special marks. They do not enjoy hearing or talking about anything but God. They are like the chatak, which prays for rain-water though the seven oceans, the Ganges, the Jamuna, and the rivers near it are all filled with water. It won't drink anything but rain-water, even though its throat is burning with thirst."

The Master wanted to hear a few songs. "Ramlal and a brahmin official of the temple garden sang :

Dwell, O Lord, O Lover of bhakti,
In the Vrindavan of my heart,
And my devotion unto Thee
Will be Thy Radha, dearly loved. . . .

And again :

The dark cloud of the summer storm fades into nothingness,
When, flute in hand and a smile on His lips,
Lighting the world with His loveliness,
Krishna, the Dark One, appears.

His dazzling yellow robe outgleams even the lightning's glare ;
A wreath of wild-flowers interwoven
Gently swings from His youthful breast
And softly kisses His feet.

See, there He stands, the Lord of life, the Moon of Nanda's line,
Outshining all the moons in heaven
And with the splendour of His rays
Flooding the Jamuna's bank !

He stands there, stealing the maidens' hearts : He lures them from
hearth and home.
Krishna enters my own heart's shrine,
And with His flute-note steals away
My wisdom, life, and soul.



To whom shall Ganga Narayana pour out his tale of woe ?
 Ah, friend, you might have understood
 Had you but gone to the Jamuna's bank
 To fill your water-jar !

Again they sang :

High in the heaven of the Mother's feet, my mind was soaring
 like a kite,
 When came a blast of sin's rough wind that drove it swiftly toward
 the earth. . . .

MASTER (*to the devotees*) : " As the tiger devours other animals, so does the 'tiger of zeal for the Lord' eat up lust, anger, and the other passions. Once this zeal grows in the heart, lust and the other passions disappear. The gopis of Vrindavan had that state of mind because of their zeal for Krishna.

" Again, this zeal for God is compared to collyrium. Radha said to her friends, ' I see Krishna everywhere.' They replied, ' Friend, you have painted your eyes with the collyrium of love : that is why you see Krishna everywhere.'

" They say that when your eyes are painted with collyrium made from the ashes of a frog's head you see snakes everywhere.

" They are indeed bound souls who constantly dwell with ' woman and gold ' and do not think of God even for a moment. How can you expect noble deeds of them ? They are like mangoes pecked by a crow, which may not be offered to the Deity in the temple, and which even men hesitate to eat.

" Bound souls, worldly people, are like silk-worms. The worms can cut through their cocoons if they want, but having woven the cocoons themselves, they are too much attached to them to leave them. And so they die there.

" Free souls are not under the control of ' woman and gold '. There are some silk-worms that cut through the cocoon they have made with such great care. But they are few and far between.

" It is maya that deludes. Only a few become spiritually awakened and are not deluded by the spell of maya. They do not come under the control of ' woman and gold '.

" There are two classes of perfect souls : those who attain perfection through spiritual practice, and those who attain it through the grace of God. Some farmers irrigate their fields with great labour. Only then can they grow crops. But there are some who do not have to irrigate at all ; their fields are flooded by rain. They don't have to go to the trouble of drawing water. One must practise spiritual discipline laboriously, in order to avoid the clutches of maya. Those who attain liberation through the grace of God do not have to labour. But they are few indeed.

" Then there is the class of the ever-perfect. They are born in each life with their spiritual consciousness already awakened. Think of a spring whose outlet is obstructed. While looking after various things in the garden, the plumber accidentally clears it and the water gushes out. Yet people are amazed to see the first manifestations of an ever-perfect soul's zeal for God. They say, ' Where was all this devotion and renunciation and love ? '

The conversation turned to the spiritual zeal of devotees, as illustrated in the earnestness of the gopis of Vrindavan. Ramlal sang :

Thou art my All in All, O Lord !—the Life of my life, the Essence of essence ;

In the three worlds I have none else but Thee to call my own.
Thou art my peace, my joy, my hope : Thou my support, my wealth, my glory ;

Thou my wisdom and my strength.

Thou art my home, my place of rest ; my dearest friend, my next of kin ;

My present and my future, Thou ; my heaven and my salvation.
Thou art my scriptures, my commandments : Thou art my ever gracious Guru ;

Thou the Spring of my boundless bliss.

Thou art the Way, and Thou the Goal ; Thou the Adorable One, O Lord !

Thou art the Mother tender-hearted ; Thou the chastising Father ;
Thou the Creator and Protector ; Thou the Helmsman who dost steer

My craft across the sea of life.

MASTER (*to the devotees*) : " Ah ! What a beautiful song !—'Thou art my All in All.' "

Ramlal sang again, this time describing the pangs of the gopis on being separated from their beloved Krishna :

Hold not, hold not the chariot's wheels !

Is it the wheels that make it move ?

The Mover of its wheels is Krishna,

By whose will the worlds are moved. . . .

The Master went into deep samadhi. His body was motionless ; he sat with folded hands as in his photograph. Tears of joy flowed from the corners of his eyes. After a long time his mind came down to the ordinary plane of consciousness. He mumbled something, of which only a word now and then could be heard by the devotees in the room. He was saying : " Thou art I, and I am Thou—Thou eatest—Thou—I eat ! . . . What is this confusion Thou hast created ? "

Continuing, the Master said : " I see everything like a man with jaundiced eyes ! I see Thee alone everywhere. O Krishna, Friend of the lowly ! O Eternal Consort of my soul ! O Govinda ! "

As he uttered the words "Eternal Consort of my soul" and "Govinda", the Master again went into samadhi. There was complete silence in the room. The eager and unsatiated eyes of the devotees were fixed on the Master, a God-man of infinite moods.

Adhar Sen arrived with several of his friends. He was a deputy magistrate, about thirty years old. This was his second visit to the Master. He was

¹ When Krishna mounted His chariot to go away to Mathura, the gopis clung to the wheels and would not let the chariot move.

accompanied by his friend Saradacharan, who was extremely unhappy because of the death of his eldest son. A retired deputy inspector of schools, Saradacharan devoted himself to meditation and prayer. Adhar had brought his friend to the Master for consolation in his afflicted state of mind.

Coming down from samadhi, the Master found the eyes of the devotees fixed on him. He muttered to himself, still in an abstracted mood.

Then, addressing the devotees, Sri Ramakrishna said : "The spiritual wisdom of worldly people is seen only on rare occasions. It is like the flame of a candle. No, it is rather like a single ray of the sun passing through a chink in a wall. Worldly people chant the name of God, but there is no zeal behind it. It is like children's swearing by God, having learnt the word from the quarrels of their aunts.

"Worldy people have no grit. If they succeed in an undertaking, it is all right, but if they don't succeed, it scarcely bothers them at all. When they need water they begin to dig a well. But as soon as they strike a stone they give up digging there and begin at another place. Perhaps they come to a bed of sand. Finding nothing but sand, they give that place up too. How can they succeed in getting water unless they continue to dig persistently where they started ?

"Man reaps the harvest of his own past actions. Hence you read in the song :

O Mother, I have no one else to blame :
Alas ! I sink in the well these very hands have dug.

"'I' and 'mine'—that is ignorance. By discriminating you will realize that what you call 'I' is really nothing but Atman. Reason it out. Are you the body or the flesh or something ? At the end you will know that you are none of these. You are free from attributes. Then you will realize that you have never been the doer of any action, that you have been free from virtue and faults alike, that you are beyond righteousness and unrighteousness.

"From ignorance a man says, 'This is gold and this is brass.' But a man of Knowledge says, 'It is all gold.'

"Reasoning stops when one sees God. But there are instances of people who have realized God and who still continue to reason. Again, there are people who, even after having seen God, chant His name with devotion and sing His glories.

"How long does a child cry ? So long as it is not sucking at its mother's breast. As soon as it is nursed it stops crying. Then the child feels only joy. Joyously it drinks the milk from its mother's breast. But it is also true that, while drinking, the child sometimes plays and laughs.

"It is God alone who has become everything. But in man He manifests Himself the most. God is directly present in the man who has the pure heart of a child and who laughs and cries and dances and sings in divine ecstasy."

By this time Sri Ramakrishna had become better acquainted with Adhar, who related the cause of his friend's grief. The Master sang, as if to himself :

To arms ! To arms, O man ! Death storms your house in battle array !

Bearing the quiver of knowledge, mount the chariot of devotion ; Bend the bow of your tongue with the bow-string of love.

And aim at him the shaft of Mother Kali's holy name.
Here is a ruse for the fray : You need no chariot or charioteer :
Fight your foe from the Ganges' bank and he is easily slain.

Then he said : "What can you do ? Be ready for Death. Death has entered the house. You must fight him with the weapon of God's holy name. God alone is the Doer. I say : 'O Lord, I do as Thou doest through me. I speak as Thou speakest through me. I am the machine and Thou art the Operator. I am the house and Thou art the Indweller. I am the engine and Thou art the Engineer.' Give your power of attorney to God. One doesn't come to grief through letting a good man assume one's responsibilities. Let His will be done.

"But isn't your grief for your son only natural ? The son is one's own self reborn. Lakshmana ran to Ravana when the latter fell dead on the battle-field. Looking at Ravana's body, he found that every one of his bones was full of holes. Thereupon he said to Rama : 'O Rama, glory be to Your arrows ! There is no spot in Ravana's body that they have not pierced.' 'Brother,' replied Rama, 'the holes you see in his bones are not from My arrows. Grief for his sons has pierced them through and through. These holes are the marks of his grief. It has penetrated his very bones.'

"But house, wife, and children are all transitory ; they have only a momentary existence. The palm-tree alone is real. One or two fruits have dropped off. Why lament ?

"God is engaged in three kinds of activity : creation, preservation, and destruction. Death is inevitable. All will be destroyed at the time of dissolution. Nothing will remain. At that time the Divine Mother will gather up the seeds for the future creation, even as the elderly mistress of the house keeps in her hotchpotch-pot little bags of cucumber seeds, 'sea-foam', blue pills, and other miscellaneous things. The Divine Mother will take Her seeds out again at the time of the new creation."

Sri Ramakrishna began to talk with Adhar on the verandah north of his room.

MASTER (to Adhar) : "You are a deputy magistrate. Remember that you have obtained your position through the grace of God. Do not forget Him but remember that all men must one day walk down the same path." We stay, in the world only a couple of days.

"This world is our field of activity. We are born here to perform certain duties. People have their homes in the country but come to Calcutta to work.

"It is necessary to do a certain amount of work. This is a kind of discipline. But one must finish it speedily. While melting gold, the goldsmith uses

³ Adhar Sen passed away eighteen months after this conversation. At the news of his death the Master wept before the Mother a long time. Adhar was a great devotee of Sri Ramakrishna, who referred to him as his own relative.

everything—the bellows, the fan, and the pipe—so that he may have the hot fire he needs to melt the metal. After the melting is over, he relaxes and asks his attendant to prepare a smoke for him. All this time his face has been hot and perspiring : but now he can smoke.

"One must have stern determination ; then alone is spiritual practice possible. One must make a firm resolve.

"There is a great power in the seed of God's name. It destroys ignorance. A seed is tender, and the sprout soft ; still it pierces the hard ground. The ground breaks and makes way for the sprout.

"The mind becomes very much distracted if one lives long in the midst of 'woman and gold'. Therefore one must be very careful. But monks do not have much to fear. The real sannyasi lives away from 'woman and gold'. Therefore through the practise of spiritual discipline he can always fix his mind on God.

"True sannyasis, those who are able to devote their minds constantly to God, are like bees, which light only on flowers and sip their honey. Those who live in the world, in the midst of 'woman and gold', may direct their attention to God ; but sometimes their minds dwell also on 'woman and gold'. They are like common flies, which light on a piece of candy, then on a sore or fifth.

"Always keep your mind fixed on God. In the beginning you must struggle a little ; later you will enjoy your pension."

Sunday, April 15, 1883

Surendra, a beloved lay disciple of the Master, had invited him to his house on the auspicious occasion of the Annapurna puja. It was about six o'clock when Sri Ramakrishna arrived there with some of his devotees. The image of the Divine Mother had been installed in the worship hall. At Her feet lay hibiscus flowers and vilwa-leaves ; from Her neck hung a garland of flowers. Sri Ramakrishna entered the hall and bowed down before the image. Then he went to the open courtyard, where he sat on a carpet, surrounded by his devotees and disciples. A few bolsters lay on the carpet, which was covered with a white linen sheet. He was asked to lean against one of these, but he pushed it aside.

MASTER (*to the devotees*) : "To lean against a bolster ! You see, it is very difficult to give up vanity. You may discriminate, saying that the ego is nothing at all ; but still it comes, nobody knows from where. A goat's legs jerk for a few moments even after its head has been cut off. Or perhaps you are frightened in a dream ; you shake off sleep and are wide awake, but still you feel your heart palpitating. Egotism is exactly like that. You may drive it away, but still it appears from somewhere. Then you look sullen and say : 'What ! I have not been shown proper respect !'"

KEDAR : "One should be lowlier than a straw and patient as a tree."

MASTER : "As for me, I consider myself as a speck of the dust of the devotee's feet."

⁶ Rich and aristocratic persons seeking comfort generally sit in this fashion.



Vaidyanath arrived. He was a well-educated man, a lawyer of the High Court of Calcutta. With folded hands he saluted the Master and took his seat at one side.

SURENDRA (*to the Master*) : "He is one of my relatives."

MASTER : "Yes, I see he has a nice nature."

SURENDRA : "He has come here because he wants to ask you a question or two."

MASTER (*to Vaidyanath*) : "All that you see is the manifestation of God's Power. No one can do anything without this Power. But you must remember that there is not an equal manifestation of God's Power in all things. Vidyasagar once asked me whether God endowed some with greater power than others. I said to him : 'If there are no greater and lesser manifestations of His Power, then why have we taken the trouble to visit you ? Have you grown two horns ?' So it stands to reason that God exists in all beings as the All-pervasive Power ; but the manifestations of His Power are different in different beings."

VAIDYANATH : "Sir, I have a doubt. People speak of free will. They say that a man can do either good or evil according to his will. Is it true ? Are we really free to do whatever we like ?"

MASTER : "Everything depends on the will of God. The world is His play. He has created all these different things—great and small, strong and weak, good and bad, virtuous and vicious. This is all His maya, His sport. You must have observed that all the trees in a garden are not of the same kind.

"As long as a man has not realized God, he thinks he is free. It is God Himself who keeps this error in man. Otherwise sin would have multiplied. Man would not have been afraid of sin, and there would have been no punishment for it.

"But do you know the attitude of one who has realized God ? He feels : 'I am the machine, and Thou, O Lord, art the Operator. I am the house and Thou art the Indweller. I am the chariot and Thou art the Driver. I move as Thou movest me ; I speak as Thou makest me speak.'

(*To Vaidyanath*) : "It is not good to argue. Isn't that so ?"

VAIDYANATH : "Yes, sir. The desire to argue disappears when a man attains wisdom."

The Master, out of his stock of a dozen English words, said, "Thank you !" in the most charming way, and all laughed.

MASTER (*to Vaidyanath*) : "You will make spiritual progress. People don't trust a man when he speaks about God. Even if a great soul affirms that he has seen God, still the average person will not accept his words. He says to himself, 'If this man has really seen God, then let him show Him to me.' But can a man learn to feel a person's pulse in one day ? He must go about with a physician for many days ; only then can he distinguish the different pulses. He must be in the company of those with whom the examination of the pulse has become a regular profession.

"Can anyone and everyone pick out a yarn of a particular count ? If you are in that trade, you can distinguish in a moment a forty-count thread from a forty-one."

The kirtan was about to begin. Some Vaishnavas were seated on one side with their mridangas and cymbals. A drummer began to play on his instrument preparatory to the singing. The sweet and melodious sound of the mridanga filled the courtyard, calling to mind the ecstatic kirtan of Sri Gauranga. The Master passed into a deep spiritual state. Now and then he looked at the drummer and said, "Ah! Ah! My hair is all standing on end."

The singers asked what kind of song they should sing. The Master said humbly, "Something about Gauranga, if you please."

The kirtan began. They sang about the celestial beauty of Sri Gauranga :

The beauty of Gauranga's face
Glowes brighter than the brightest gold ;
His smile illuminates all the world.
Who cares for even a million moons
Shining in the blue autumn sky ?

The chief musician added improvised lines as they sang : "O friend, his face shines like the full moon ?" "But it does not wane nor has it any stain." "It illuminates the devotee's heart." Again he improvised : "His face is bathed with the essence of a million moons."

At these words the Master went into deep samadhi. After a short while he regained consciousness of the sense world. Then he suddenly stood up, overpowered by his spiritual mood, and sang improvised lines with the professionals, thinking himself to be a milkmaid of Vrindavan gone mad with the beauty of Sri Krishna's form : "Whose fault is it—my mind's or his beauty's ?" "In the three worlds I see nothing but my beloved Krishna."

The Master danced and sang. All remained spellbound as they watched. The chief musician sang the words of a gopi : "O flute, pray stop. Can you not go to sleep ?" One of the musicians added a new line : "How can it sleep ? It rests on Krishna's lips."

The Master sat down. The music went on. They sang, assuming the mood of Radha : "My eyes are blinded. My ears are deaf. I have lost the power of smell. All my senses are paralysed. But, alas, why am I left alone ?"

Finally the musicians sang of the union of Radha and Krishna :

Radha and Krishna are joined at last in the Nidhu Grove of
Vrindavan ;
Incomparable their beauty, and limitless their love !
The one half shines like yellow gold, the other like bluest
sapphire ;
Round the neck, on one side, a wild-flower garland hangs,
And, on the other, there swings a necklace of precious gems.
A ring of gold adorns one ear, a ring of shell the other ;
Half of the brow is bright as the blazing midday sun,
The other softly gleams with the glow of the rising moon.
Upon one half of the head a graceful peacock feather stands,
And, from the other half, there hangs a braid of hair.

As the music came to a close the Master said, "Bhagavata—Bhakta—Bhagavan," and bowed low to the devotees seated on all sides. He touched with his forehead the ground made holy by the singing of the sacred music.

It was now about half past nine in the evening. Surendra entertained the Master and the devotees with a sumptuous feast. When it was time to take leave of their host, the Master, the devotees, and Surendra entered the worship hall and stood before the image.

SURENDRA (*to the Master*) : "No one has sung anything about the Divine Mother today."

MASTER (*pointing to the image*) : "Ah ! Look at the beauty of the hall. The light of the Divine Mother seems to have lighted the whole place. Such a sight fills the heart with joy. Grief and desire for pleasure disappear."

"But can one not see God as formless Reality ? Of course one can. But not if one has the slightest trace of worldliness. The rishis of olden times renounced everything and then contemplated Satchidananda, the Indivisible Brahman."

"The Brahmajnanis of modern times⁷ sing of God as 'immutable, homogeneous'. It sounds very dry to me. It seems as if the singers themselves don't enjoy the sweetness of God's Bliss. One doesn't want a refreshing drink made with sugar candy if one is satisfied with mere coarse treacle."

"Just see how happy you are, looking at this image of the Deity. But those who always cry after the formless Reality do not get anything. They realize nothing either inside or outside."

The Master sang a song to the Divine Mother :

O Mother, ever blissful as Thou art,
Do not deprive Thy worthless child of bliss !
My mind knows nothing but Thy Lotus Feet.
The King of Death scowls at me terribly ;
Tell me, Mother, what shall I say to him ?

It was my heart's desire to sail my boat
Across the ocean of this mortal life,
O Durga, with Thy name upon my lips.
I never dreamt that Thou wouldest drown me here
In the dark waters of this shoreless sea.

Both day and night I swim among its waves,
Chanting Thy saving name ; yet even so
There is no end, O Mother, to my grief.
If I am drowned this time, in such a plight,
No one will ever chant Thy name again.

Again he sang :

Repeat, O mind, my Mother Durga's hallowed name !
Whoever treads the path, repeating "Durga ! Durga !",
Siva Himself protects with His almighty trident.
Thou art the day, O Mother ! Thou art the dusk and the night.
Sometimes Thou art man, and sometimes woman art Thou.
Thou mayest even say to me : "Step aside ! Go away !"
Yet I shall cling to Thee, O Durga ! Unto Thy feet
As Thine anklets I shall cling, making their tinkling sound.

⁷ A reference to the members of the Brahmo Samaj.

Mother, when as the Kite³ Thou soarest in the sky,
 There, in the water beneath, as a minnow I shall be swimming;
 Upon me Thou wilt pounce, and pierce me through with Thy
 claws.

Thus, when the breath of life forsakes me in Thy grip,
 Do not deny me the shelter of Thy Lotus Feet!

The Master saluted the divine image. As he came down the steps, he called softly to Rakhal : " Where are my shoes ? Are they missing ? "

As the Master got into the carriage, Surendra and the other devotees bowed down before him. Then the carriage started for Dakshineswar. The moon still lighted the streets.

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³ According to Hindu mythology the Divine Mother at one time took the form of a bird similar to the kite.

X

THE MASTER WITH THE BRAHMO DEVOTEES (II)

April 22, 1883

SRI RAMAKRISHNA paid a visit to Benimadhav Pal's garden house at Sirthi, near Calcutta, on the occasion of the semi-annual festival of the Brahmo Samaj. Many devotees of the Samaj were present and sat around the Master. Now and then some of them asked him questions.

A BRAHMO DEVOTEE : "Sir, what is the way ?"

MASTER : "Attachment to God, or, in other words, love for Him. And secondly, prayer."

BRAHMO DEVOTEE : "Which one is the way—love or prayer ?"

MASTER : "First love, and then prayer."

The Master sang :

Cry to your Mother Syama with a real cry, O mind !
And how can She hold Herself from you ?
How can Syama stay away ? . . .

Continuing, the Master said : "And one must always chant the name and glories of God and pray to Him. An old metal pot must be scrubbed every day. What is the use of cleaning it only once ? Further, one must practise discrimination and renunciation ; one must be conscious of the unreality of the world."

BRAHMO : "Is it good to renounce the world ?"

MASTER : "Not for all. Those who have not yet come to the end of their enjoyments should not renounce the world. Can one get drunk on two annas' worth of wine ?"

BRAHMO : "Then should they lead a worldly life ?"

MASTER : "Yes, they should try to perform their duties in a detached way. Before you break the jack-fruit open, rub your hands with oil, so that the sticky milk will not smear them. The maidservant in a rich man's house performs all her duties, but her mind dwells on her home in the country. This is an example of doing duty in a detached way. You should renounce the world only in mind. But a sannyasi should renounce the world both inwardly and outwardly."

BRAHMO : "What is the meaning of the 'end of enjoyments' ?"

* MASTER : " I mean the enjoyment of ' woman and gold '. It is risky to put a typhoid patient in a room where pitchers of water and jugs of pickled tamarind are kept. Most people don't feel any longing for God unless they have once passed through the experience of wealth, name, fame, creature comforts, and the like, that is to say, unless they have seen through these enjoyments."

BRAHMO : " Who is really bad, man or woman ? "

MASTER : " As there are women endowed with vidyasakti, so also there are women with avidyasakti. A woman endowed with spiritual attributes leads a man to God, but a woman who is the embodiment of delusion makes him forget God and drowns him in the ocean of worldliness.

" This universe is created by the Mahamaya¹ of God. Mahamaya contains both vidyamaya, the illusion of knowledge, and avidyamaya, the illusion of ignorance. Through the help of vidyamaya one cultivates such virtues as the taste for holy company, knowledge, devotion, love, and renunciation. Avidyamaya consists of the five elements and the objects of the five senses—form, flavour, smell, touch, and sound. These make one forget God."

BRAHMO : " If the power of avidya is the cause of ignorance, then why has God created it ? "

MASTER : " That is His play. The glory of light cannot be appreciated without darkness. Happiness cannot be understood without misery. Knowledge of good is possible because of knowledge of evil.

" Further, the mango grows and ripens on account of the covering skin. You throw away the skin when the mango is fully ripe and ready to be eaten. It is possible for a man to attain gradually to the Knowledge of Brahman because of the covering skin of maya. Maya in its aspects of vidya and avidya may be likened to the skin of the mango. Both are necessary."

BRAHMO : " Sir, is it good to worship God with form, an image of the Deity made of clay ? "

MASTER : " You do not accept God with form. That is all right. The image is not meant for you. For you it is good to deepen your feeling toward your own Ideal. From the worshippers of the Personal God you should learn their yearning—for instance, Sri Krishna's attraction for Radha. You should learn from the worshippers of the Personal God their love for their Chosen Ideal. When the believers in the Personal God worship the images of Kali and Durga, with what feeling they cry from the depths of their souls, ' Mother ! O Mother ! ' How much they love the Deity ! You should accept that feeling. You don't have to accept the image."

BRAHMO : " How does one cultivate the spirit of dispassion ? Why don't all attain it ? "

MASTER : " Dispassion is not possible unless there is satiety through enjoyment. You can easily cajole a small child with candies or toys. But after eating the candies and finishing its play, it cries, ' I want to go to my mother.' Unless you take the child to its mother, it will throw away the toy and scream at the top of its voice."

¹ The inscrutable Power of Illusion.

The members of the Brahmo Samaj are opposed to the traditional guru system of orthodox Hinduism. Therefore the Brahmo devotee asked the Master about it.

BRAHMO : " Is spiritual knowledge impossible without a guru ? "

MASTER : " Satchidananda alone is the Guru. If a man in the form of a guru awakens spiritual consciousness in you, then know for certain that it is God the Absolute who has assumed that human form for your sake. The guru is like a companion who leads you by the hand. After the realization of God, one loses the distinction between the guru and the disciple. That creates a very difficult situation ; there the guru and the disciple do not see each other.² It was for this reason that Janaka said to Sukadeva, ' Give me first my teacher's fee if you want me to initiate you into the Knowledge of Brahman.' For the distinction between the teacher and the disciple ceases to exist after the disciple attains to Brahman. The relationship between them remains as long as the disciple does not see God."

It was dusk. Some of the Brahmo devotees said to the Master, " Perhaps it is time for your evening devotions."

MASTER : " No, it isn't exactly that. One should pass through these disciplines in the beginning. Later one doesn't need the rituals of formal worship or to follow the injunctions."

After dusk the preacher of the Brahmo Samaj conducted the service from the pulpit. The service was interspersed with recitations from the Upani-shads and the singing of Brahmo songs.

After the service the Master and the preacher conversed.

MASTER : " Well, it seems to me that both the formless Deity and God with form are real. What do you say ? "

PREACHER : " Sir, I compare the formless God to the electric current, which is not seen with the eyes but can be felt."

MASTER : " Yes, both are true. God with form is as real as God without form. Do you know what describing God as being formless only is like ? It is like man's playing only a monotone on his flute, though it has seven holes. But on the same instrument another man plays different melodies. Likewise, in how many ways the believers in a Personal God enjoy Him ! They enjoy Him through many different attitudes : the serene attitude, the attitude of a servant, a friend, a mother, a husband, or a lover.

" You see, the thing is somehow or other to get into the Lake of the Nectar of Immortality. Suppose one person gets into It by propitiating the Deity with hymns and worship, and you are pushed into It. The result will be the same. Both of you will certainly become immortal.

" I give the Brahmos the illustration of water and ice. Satchidananda is like an endless expanse of water. The water of the great ocean in cold regions freezes into blocks of ice. Similarly, through the cooling influence of divine love, Satchidananda assumes forms for the sake of the bhaktas. The rishis had the vision of the supersensuous Spirit-form and talked with It. But

² Because the aspirant realizes, at that time, the oneness of existence and hence does not perceive the separate existence of the teacher.

devotees acquire a 'love body', and with its help they see the Spirit-form of the Absolute.

"It is also said in the Vedas that Brahman is beyond mind and words. The heat of the sun of Knowledge melts the ice-like form of the Personal God. On attaining the Knowledge of Brahman and communing with It in nirvikalpa samadhi, one realizes Brahman, the Infinite, without form or shape and beyond mind and words.

"The nature of Brahman cannot be described. About It one remains silent. Who can explain the Infinite in words? However high a bird may soar, there are regions higher still. What do you say?"

PREACHER : "Yes, sir, it is so stated in the Vedanta philosophy."

MASTER : "Once a salt doll went to the ocean to measure its depth. But it could not come back to give a report. According to one school of thought, sages like Sukadeva saw and touched the Ocean of Brahman, but did not plunge into It.

"Once I said to Vidyasagar, 'Everything else but Brahman has been polluted, as it were, like food touched by the tongue.' In other words, no one has been able to describe what Brahman is. A thing once uttered by the tongue becomes polluted. Vidyasagar, great pundit though he was, was highly pleased with my remarks.

"It is said that there are places near Kedar³ that are covered with eternal snow; he who climbs too high cannot come back. Those who have tried to find out what there is in the higher regions, or what one feels there, have not come back to tell us about it.

"After having the vision of God man is overpowered with bliss. He becomes silent. Who will speak? Who will explain?

"The king lives beyond seven gates. At each gate sits a man endowed with great power and glory. At each gate the visitor asks, 'Is this the king?' The gate-keeper answers, 'No. Not this, not this.' The visitor passes through the seventh gate and becomes overpowered with joy. He is speechless. This time he doesn't have to ask, 'Is this the king?' The mere sight of him removes all doubts."

PREACHER : "Yes, sir, it is so described in Vedanta." ■

MASTER : "When the Godhead is thought of as creating, preserving, and destroying, It is known as the Personal God, Saguna Brahman, or the Primal Energy, Adyasakti. Again, when It is thought of as beyond the three gunas, then It is called the Attributeless Reality, Nirguna Brahman, beyond speech and thought; this is the Supreme Brahman, Parabrahman.

"Under the spell of God's maya man forgets his true nature. He forgets that he is heir to the infinite glories of his Father. This divine maya is made up of three gunas. And all three are robbers; for they rob man of all his treasures and make him forget his true nature. The three gunas are sattva, rajas, and tamas. Of these, sattva alone points the way to God. But even sattva cannot take a man to God.

³ A high peak in the Himalayas, which is a place of pilgrimage for the Hindus.

"Let me tell you a story. Once a rich man was passing through a forest, when three robbers surrounded him and robbed him of all his wealth. After snatching all his possessions from him, one of the robbers said : 'What's the good of keeping the man alive ? Kill him.' Saying this, he was about to strike their victim with his sword, when the second robber interrupted and said : 'There's no use in killing him. Let us bind him fast and leave him here. Then he won't be able to tell the police.' Accordingly the robbers tied him with a rope, left him, and went away.

"After a while the third robber returned to the rich man and said : 'Ah ! You're badly hurt, aren't you ? Come, I'm going to release you.' The third robber set the man free and led him out of the forest. When they came near the highway, the robber said, 'Follow this road and you will reach home easily.' 'But you must come with me too', said the man. 'You have done so much for me. We shall all be happy to see you at our home.' 'No,' said the robber, 'it is not possible for me to go there. The police will arrest me.' So saying, he left the rich man after pointing out his way.

"Now, the first robber, who said : 'What's the good of keeping the man alive ? Kill him', is *tamas*. It destroys. The second robber is *rajas*, which binds a man to the world and entangles him in a variety of activities. *Rajas* makes him forget God. *Sattva* alone shows the way to God. It produces virtues like compassion, righteousness, and devotion. Again, *sattva* is like the last step of the stairs. Next to it is the roof. The supreme Brahman is man's own abode. One cannot attain the Knowledge of Brahman unless one transcends the three *gunas*."

PREACHER : "You have given us a fine talk, sir."

MASTER (with a smile) : "Do you know the nature of devotees ? When one devotee meets another, he says, 'Let me speak and you listen ; and when you speak I shall listen.' You are a preacher and teach so many people ! You are a steamship, and I am a mere fishing-boat." (*All laugh.*)

Wednesday, May 2, 1883

About five o'clock in the afternoon Sri Ramakrishna arrived at the temple of the Brahmo Samaj in Nandanbagan, accompanied by M., Rakhal, and a few other devotees. At first the Master sat in the drawing-room on the ground floor, where the Brahmo devotees gradually assembled. Rabindranath Tagore and a few other members of the Tagore family were present on this occasion.

Sri Ramakrishna was asked to go to the worship hall on the second floor. A dais had been built on the eastern side of the room. There were a few chairs and a piano in the hall. The Brahmo worship was to begin at dusk.

As soon as the Master entered the worship hall he bowed low before the dais. Having taken his seat, he said to M. and the other devotees, "Narendra once asked me, 'What good is there in bowing before the Brahmo Samaj temple ?' The sight of the temple recalls to my mind God alone ; then God-Consciousness is kindled in my mind. God is present where people talk about Him. One feels there the presence of all the holy places. Places of worship recall God alone to my mind."

Once a devotee was overwhelmed with ecstasy at the sight of a babla-tree. The idea flashed in his mind that the handle of the axe used in the garden of the temple of Radhakanta was made from the wood of the babla. Another devotee had such devotion for his guru that he would be overwhelmed with divine feeling at the sight of his guru's neighbours. Krishna-consciousness would be kindled in Radha's mind at the sight of a cloud, a blue dress,⁴ or a painting of Krishna. She would become restless and cry like a mad person, 'Krishna, where art Thou ?'

GHOSAL : "But madness is not desirable."

MASTER : "What do you mean ? Was Radha's madness the madness that comes from brooding over worldly objects and makes one unconscious ? One attains that madness by meditating on God. Haven't you heard of love-madness and knowledge-madness ?"

A BRAHMO DEVOTEE : "How can one realize God ?"

MASTER : "By directing your love to Him and constantly reasoning that God alone is real and the world illusory. The aswatha tree alone is permanent : its fruit is transitory."

BRAHMO : "We have passions like anger and lust. What shall we do with these ?"

MASTER : "Direct the six passions to God. The impulse of lust should be turned into the desire to have intercourse with Atman. Feel angry at those who stand in your way to God. Feel greedy for Him. If you must have the feeling of *I and mine*, then associate it with God. Say, for instance, 'My Rama, my Krishna.' If you must have pride, then feel like Bibhishana, who said, 'I have touched the feet of Rama with my head ; I will not bow this head before anyone else.'"

BRAHMO : "If it is God that makes me do everything, then I am not responsible for my sins."

MASTER (*with a smile*) : "Yes, Duryodhana also said that. 'O Krishna I do what Thou, seated in my heart, makest me do.' If a man has the firm conviction that God alone is the Doer and he is His instrument, then he cannot do anything sinful. He who has learnt to dance correctly never makes a false step. One cannot even believe in the existence of God until one's heart becomes pure."

Sri Ramakrishna looked at the devotees assembled in the worship hall and said : "It is very good to gather in this way, now and then, and think of God and sing His name and glories. But the worldly man's yearning for God is momentary. It lasts as long as a drop of water on a red-hot frying-pan."

The worship was about to begin, and the big hall was filled with Brahmo devotees. Some of the Brahmo ladies sat on chairs, with music books in their hands. The songs of the Brahmo Samaj were sung to the accompaniment of harmonium and piano. Sri Ramakrishna's joy was unbounded. The invocation was followed by a prayer, and then the worship began. The acharyas, seated on the platform, recited from the Vedas :

Om. Thou art our Father. Give us right knowledge ; do not destroy us ! We bow to Thee.

⁴ Krishna had a dark-blue complexion.

The Brahmo devotees chanted in chorus with the acharyas :

Om. Brahman is Truth, Knowledge, Infinity. It shines as Bliss and Immortality. Brahman is Peace, Blessedness, and the One without a Second ; It is pure and unstained by sin.

The acharyas chanted in praise of God :

Om. O Reality, Cause of the Universe, we bow to Thee !

Then the acharyas chanted their prayer together :

From the unreal lead us to the Real ; from darkness lead us to Light ; from death lead us to Immortality. Reach us through and through, O Rudra, and protect us evermore with Thy Compassionate Face.

As Sri Ramakrishna heard these hymns, he went into a spiritual mood. After this an acharya read a paper.

The worship was over. Most of the devotees went downstairs or to the courtyard for fresh air while the refreshments were being made ready. It was about nine o'clock in the evening. The hosts were so engrossed with the other invited guests that they forgot to pay any attention to Sri Ramakrishna.

MASTER (*to Rakhal and the other devotees*) : "What's the matter ? Nobody is paying any attention to us !"

RAKHAL (*angrily*) : "Sir, let us leave here and go to Dakshineswar."

MASTER (*with a smile*) : "Keep quiet ! The carriage hire is three rupees and two annas. Who will pay that ? Stubbornness won't get us anywhere. You haven't a penny, and you are making these empty threats ! Besides, where shall we find food at this late hour of the night ?"

After a long time dinner was announced. The devotees were asked to take their seats. The Master, with Rakhal and the others, followed the crowd to the second floor. No room could be found for him inside the hall. Finally, with great difficulty, a place was found for him in a dusty corner. A brahmin woman served some curry, but Sri Ramakrishna could not eat it. He ate luchi with salt and took some sweets.

There was no limit to the Master's kindness. The hosts were mere youngsters ; how could he be displeased with them, even though they did not show him proper respect ? Further, it would have been inauspicious for the household if a holy man had left the place without taking food. Finally, the feast had been prepared in the name of God.

Sri Ramakrishna got into a carriage ; but who was to pay the hire ? The hosts could not be found. Referring to this incident afterwards, the Master said to the devotees, jokingly : "The boys went to our hosts for the carriage hire. First they were put out, but at last they managed to get together three rupees. Our hosts refused to pay the extra two annas and said, 'No, that will do.' "

Sunday, May 13, 1883

The Master paid a visit to the Hari-Bhakti-Pradayini Sabha of Kansharpura, in Calcutta, on the anniversary day of that religious society.

* Kirtan and other forms of devotional music had been arranged for the occasion. The songs centred round the Vrindavan episode of Sri Krishna's life. The theme was Radha's pique because of Sri Krishna's having visited Chandravali, another of the gopis of Vrindavan. Radha's friends tried to console her and said to her : " Why are you piqued ? It seems you are not thinking of Krishna's happiness, but only of your own." Radha said to them : " I am not angry at His going to Chandravali's grove. But why should He go there ? She doesn't know how to take care of Him."

May 20, 1883

The following Sunday a kirtan was arranged at the house of Ram, one of the Master's householder devotees. Sri Ramakrishna graced the occasion with his presence. The musicians sang about Radha's pangs at her separation from Krishna :

Radha said to her friends : " I have loved to see Krishna from my childhood. My finger-nails are worn off from counting the days on them till I shall see Him. Once He gave me a garland. Look, it has withered, but I have not yet thrown it away. Alas ! Where has the Moon of Krishna risen now ? Has that Moon gone away from my firmament, afraid of the Rahu¹ of my pique ? Alas ! Shall I ever see Krishna again ? O my beloved Krishna, I have never been able to look at You to my heart's complete satisfaction. I have only one pair of eyes ; they blink and so hinder my vision. And further, on account of streams of tears I could not see enough of my Beloved. The peacock feather on the crown of His head shines like arrested lightning. The peacocks, seeing Krishna's dark-cloud complexion, would dance in joy, spreading their tails. O friends, I shall not be able to keep my life-breath. After my death, place my body on a branch of the dark tamala tree and inscribe on my body Krishna's sweet name."

The Master said : " God and His name are identical ; that is the reason Radha said that. There is no difference between Rama and His holy name."

May 27, 1883

Sri Ramakrishna was in his room at Dakshineswar, conversing with the devotees. It was about nine o'clock in the morning.

MASTER : (*to M. and the other devotees*) : " It is not good to harbour malice. The Saktas, the Vaishnavas, and the Vedantists quarrel among themselves. That is not wise. Padmalochan was court pundit of the Maharaja of Burdwan. Once at a meeting the pundits were discussing whether Siva was superior to Brahma, or Brahma to Siva. Padmalochan gave an appropriate reply. ' I don't know anything about it ', said he. ' I haven't talked either to Siva or to Brahma.'

" If people feel sincere longing, they will find that all paths lead to God. But one should have nishtha, single-minded devotion. It is also described as chaste and unswerving devotion to God. It is like a tree with only one trunk shooting straight up. Promiscuous devotion is like a tree with five branches.

¹ A monster in Hindu mythology, said to cause the eclipse by devouring the sun and the moon.

Such was the single-minded devotion of the gopis to Krishna that they "didn't care to look at anyone but the Krishna they had seen at Vrindavan—the Shepherd Krishna, bedecked with a garland of yellow wild-flowers and wearing a peacock feather on His crest. At the sight of Krishna at Mathura with a turban on His head and dressed in royal robes, the gopis pulled down their veils. They would not look at His face. 'Who is this man ?' they said. 'Should we violate our chaste love for Krishna by talking to him ?'

"The devotion of the wife to her husband is also an instance of unswerving love. She feeds her brothers-in-law as well, and looks after their comforts, but she has a special relationship with her husband. Likewise, one may have that single-minded devotion to one's own religion ; but one should not on that account hate other faiths. On the contrary, one should have a friendly attitude toward them." 12.4.9c

The Master bathed in the Ganges and then went to the Kali temple with M. He sat before the image and offered flowers at the feet of the Divine Mother. Now and then he put flowers on his own head and meditated.

After a long time he stood up. He was in a spiritual mood and danced before the image, chanting the name of Kali. Now and again he said : "O Mother ! O Destroyer of suffering ! O Remover of grief and agony !" Was he teaching people thus to pray to the Mother of the Universe with a yearning heart, in order to get rid of the suffering inevitable in physical life ?

Sri Ramakrishna returned to his room and sat on the west porch. Rakhal, M., Nakur Vaishnav, and other devotees were with him. Nakur had been known to the Master for about twenty-five years. He was a devotee of Gauranga and had a small shop which Sri Ramakrishna had often visited when he first came to Calcutta from Kamarpukur.

Still overpowered with divine ecstasy, the Master sang :

O Kali, my Mother full of Bliss ! Enchantress of the almighty Siva !
In Thy delirious joy Thou dancest, clapping Thy hands together !
Eternal One ! Thou great First Cause, clothed in the form of the
Void !

Thou wearest the moon upon Thy brow.
Where didst Thou find Thy garland of heads before the universe
was made ?

Thou art the Mover of all that move, and we are but Thy helpless
toys ;

We move alone as Thou movest us and speak as through us Thou
speakest.

But worthless Kamalakanta says, fondly berating Thee :
Confoundress ! With Thy flashing sword
Thoughtlessly Thou hast put to death my virtue and my sin alike !

He sang again :

Mother, Thou art our sole Redeemer,
Thou the Support of the three gunas,
Higher than the most high.
Thou art compassionate, I know,
Who takest away our bitter grief.

Sandhya art Thou, and Gayatri :
 Thou dost sustain this universe.
 Mother, the Help art Thou
 Of those that have no help but Thee,
 O Eternal Beloved of Siva !

Thou art in earth, in water Thou :
 Thou liest at the root of all.
 In me, in every creature,
 Thou hast Thy home ; though clothed with form,
 Yet art Thou formless Reality.

The Master sang a few more songs in praise of the Divine Mother. Then he said to the devotees : "It is not always best to tell householders about the sorrows of life. They want bliss. Those who suffer from chronic poverty can go without food for a day or two. But it is not wise to talk about the sorrows and miseries of life to those who suffer if their food is delayed a few minutes. Vaishnavcharan used to say : 'Why should one constantly dwell on sin ? Be merry !'"

While the Master was resting after his midday meal, Manohor Goswami, a singer of kirtan, arrived. He sang about the ecstatic love of Gauranga and the divine episode of Vrindavan. The Master was absorbed in a deep spiritual mood. He tore off his shirt and said, to the melody of the kirtan, assuming the attitude of Radha : "O Krishna, my Beloved ! O friends, bring Krishna to me. Then you will be real friends. Or take me to Him, and I will be your slave for ever."

The musician sat spellbound at Sri Ramakrishna's ecstasy ; then he said with folded hands, "Won't you please rid me of my worldliness ?"

MASTER : " You are like the holy man who went about the city after first finding a lodging. You are a sweet person and express many sweet ideas."

MUSICIAN : " Sir, I am like the bullock that only carries the bag of sugar but cannot taste it. Alas, I myself do not enjoy the sweetness of divine bliss."

The melodious music went on, and all were filled with joy.

Saturday, June 2, 1883

Sri Ramakrishna had been invited to visit the homes of his devotees Balaram, Adhar, and Ram in Calcutta. Devotional music had been arranged by Adhar and Ram. The Master was accompanied in the carriage by Rakhal, M., and others.

As they drove along, Sri Ramakrishna said to the devotees : " You see, sin flies away when love of God grows in a man's heart, even as the water of the reservoir dug in a meadow dries up under the heat of the sun. But one cannot love God if one feels attracted to worldly things, to 'woman and gold'. Merely taking the vow of monastic life will not help a man if he is attached to the world. It is like swallowing your own spittle after spitting it out on the ground."

After a few minutes the Master continued : " The members of the Brahmo Samaj do not accept God with form. Narendra says that God with

form is a mere idol. He says further : ' What ? He⁶ still goes to the Kali temple ! '

Sri Ramakrishna and his party arrived at Balaram's house. Yajnanath of Nandanbagan came to invite the Master to his house at four o'clock in the afternoon. Sri Ramakrishna agreed to go if he felt well. After Yajnanath's departure the Master went into an ecstatic mood. He said to the Divine Mother : " Mother, what is all this ? Stop ! What are these things Thou art showing to me ? What is it that Thou dost reveal to me through Rakhal and others ? The form is disappearing. But, Mother, what people call ' man ' is only a pillow-case, nothing but a pillow-case. Consciousness is Thine alone.

" The modern Brahmajnanis have not tasted Thy sweet bliss. Their eyes look dry and so do their faces. They won't achieve anything without ecstatic love of God.

" Mother, once I asked Thee to give me a companion just like myself. Is that why Thou hast given me Rakhal ? "

The Master went to Adhar's house, where arrangements were being made for the kirtan. Many devotees and neighbours had gathered in Adhar's drawing-room, anxious to listen to the Master's words.

MASTER (*to the devotees*) : " Both worldliness and liberation depend on God's will. It is God alone who has kept man in the world in a state of ignorance ; and man will be free when God, of His own sweet will, calls him to Himself. It is like the mother calling the child at meal-time, when he is out playing. When the time comes for setting a man free, God makes him seek the company of holy men. Further, it is God who makes him restless for spiritual life."

A NEIGHBOUR : " What kind of restlessness, sir ? "

MASTER : " Like the restlessness of a clerk who has lost his job. He makes the round of the offices daily and asks whether there is any vacancy. When that restlessness comes, man longs for God. A sop, seated comfortably with one leg over the other, chewing betel-leaf and twirling his moustaches—a carefree dandy—, cannot attain God."

NEIGHBOUR : " Can one get this longing for God through frequenting the company of holy men ? "

MASTER : " Yes, it is possible. But not for a confirmed scoundrel. A sannyasi's kamandalu, made of bitter gourd, travels with him to the four great places of pilgrimage but still does not lose its bitterness."

The kirtan began. The musician sang of Sri Krishna's life in Vrindavan :

RADHA : " Friend, I am about to die. Give me back my Krishna."

FRIEND : " But, Radha, the cloud of Krishna was ready to burst into rain. It was yourself who blew it away with the strong wind of your pique. You are certainly not happy to see Krishna happy ; or why were you piqued ? "

RADHA : " But this pride was not mine. My pride has gone away with Him who made me proud."

After the music Sri Ramakrishna conversed with the devotees.

⁶ Referring to the Master.

• MASTER : " The gopis worshipped Katyayani in order to be united with Sri Krishna. Everyone is under the authority of the Divine Mother, Mahamaya, the Primal Energy. Even the Incarnations of God accept the help of maya to fulfil their mission on earth. Therefore they worship the Primal Energy. Don't you see how bitterly Rama wept for Sita ? 'Brahman weeps, ensnared in the meshes of maya.'

" Vishnu incarnated Himself as a sow in order to kill the demon Hiranyaksha. After killing the demon, the sow remained quite happy with her young ones. Forgetting her real nature, she was suckling them very contentedly. The gods in heaven could not persuade Vishnu to relinquish His sow's body and return to the celestial regions. He was absorbed in the happiness of His beast form. After consulting among themselves, the gods sent Siva to the sow. Siva asked the sow, ' Why have you forgotten yourself ? ' Vishnu replied through the sow's body, ' Why, I am quite happy here.' Thereupon with a stroke of his trident Siva destroyed the sow's body, and Vishnu went back to heaven."

From Adhar's house Sri Ramakrishna went to Ram's house. Ramchandra Dutta, one of the chief householder disciples of the Master, lived in Calcutta. He had been one of the first to announce the Master as an incarnation of God. The Master had visited his house a number of times and unstintingly praised the devotion and generosity of this beloved disciple. A few of the Master's disciples made Ram's house virtually their own dwelling-place.

Ram had arranged a special festival to celebrate the Master's visit. The small courtyard was nicely decorated. A kathak, seated on a raised platform, was reciting from the *Bhagavata* when the Master arrived. Ram greeted him respectfully and seated him near the reader. The disciple was extremely happy. The kathak was in the midst of the story of King Harischandra.

The great King Harischandra of the Purana was the embodiment of generosity. No one ever went away from him empty-handed. Now, the sage Viswamitra, wanting to test the extent of the king's charity, extracted from him a promise to grant any boon that he might ask. Then the sage asked for the gift of the sea-girt world, of which Harischandra was king. Without the slightest hesitation the king gave away his kingdom. Then Viswamitra demanded the auxiliary fee, which alone makes charity valid and meritorious.

The kathak continued his recitation :

Viswamitra said to the king : " O King, you have given away the entire world, which was your kingdom. It now belongs to me ; you cannot claim any place here. But you may live in Benares, which belongs to Siva. I shall lead you there with your wife Saibya, and Rohitasva, your son. There you can procure the auxiliary fee that you owe me." The royal family, accompanied by the sage, reached Benares and visited the temple of Siva.

At the very mention of Siva, the Master went into a spiritual mood and repeated the holy name several times indistinctly.

The kathak continued :

The king could not procure the fee and was compelled to sell Saibya, his royal consort, to a brahmin. With her went Prince Rohitasva. But since even that was not enough to redeem his pledge to the sage, Harischandra sold himself to an untouchable who kept a cremation ground. He was ordered to supervise the cremations.

One day, while plucking flowers for his brahmin master, Prince Rohitasva was bitten by a venomous snake and that very night died. The cruel brahmin would not leave his bed to help the poor mother cremate the body. The night was dark and stormy. Lightning rent the black clouds. Saibya started for the cremation ground alone, carrying the body of her son in her arms. Smitten with fear and overpowered with grief, the queen filled heaven and earth with her wailing. Arriving at the cremation ground, she did not recognize her husband, who demanded the usual fee for the cremation. Saibya was penniless and wept bitterly at her unending misfortunes. The impenetrable darkness was illumined only by the terrible flames of the cremation pyres. Above her the thunder roared, and before her the uncouth guardian of the cremation ground demanded his fee. She who had once been queen of the world sat there with her only child dead and cold on her lap.

The devotees burst into tears and loudly lamented this tragic episode of a royal life. And what was the Master doing ? He was listening to the recital with rapt attention. Tear-drops appeared in his eyes and he wiped them away.

The kathak continued :

When the queen, wailing bitterly, uttered the name of her husband, Harischandra at once recognized his wife and son. Then the two wept for the dead prince. Yet in all these misfortunes the king never once uttered a word of regret for his charity.

Finally the sage Viswamitra appeared and told them that he had only wanted to put the king's charitable impulses to a crucial test. Then, through his spiritual power, the sage brought the prince back to life and returned to the king his lost kingdom.

Sri Ramakrishna asked the kathak to recite the episode of Uddhava, the friend and devotee of Krishna.

At the request of Krishna, Uddhava had gone to Vrindavan to console the cowherds and the gopis, who were sore at heart because of their separation from their beloved Krishna.

The kathak said :

When Uddhava arrived at Vrindavan, the gopis and cowherd boys ran to him eagerly and asked him : " How is our Krishna ? Has He forgotten us altogether ? Doesn't He even speak our names ? " So saying, some of them wept. Others accompanied him to various places in Vrindavan still filled with Krishna's sweet memory. They said : " Here it was that Krishna lifted up Mount Govardhan, and here He killed the demons sent by the evil-minded Kamsa. In this meadow He tended His cows ; here on the bank of the Jamuna He sported with the gopis. Here He played with the cowherd boys, and here in these groves He met

- the gopis secretly." Uddhava said to them : " Why are you so grief-stricken at Krishna's absence ? He resides in all beings as their indwelling Spirit. He is God Himself, and nothing can exist without God." " But ", said the gopis, " we do not understand all that. We can neither read nor write. We know only our Krishna of Vrindavan, who played with us here in so many ways." Uddhava said : " Krishna is God Himself. By meditating on Him, man escapes from birth and death in the world and attains liberation." The gopis said : " We do not understand big words like ' liberation.' We want to see the Krishna of our hearts."

The Master listened to the story from the *Bhagavata* with great attention and said at last, " Yes, the gopis were right."

Then he sang :

Though I' am never loath to grant salvation,
I hesitate indeed to grant pure love.
Whoever wins pure love surpasses all ;
He is adored by men ;
He triumphs over the three worlds.

Listen, Chandravali ! ⁷ I shall tell you of love :
Mukti a man may gain, but rare is bhakti.
Solely for pure love's sake did I become
King Vali's door-keeper
Down in his realm in the nether world.⁸

Alone in Vrindavan can pure love be found ;
Its secret none but the gopas and gopis know.
For pure love's sake I dwelt in Nanda's house ;
Taking him as My father,
I carried his burdens on My head.

The Master said to the kathak : " The gopis had ecstatic love, unswerving and single-minded devotion to one ideal. Do you know the meaning of devotion that is not loyal to one ideal ? It is devotion tinged with intellectual knowledge. It makes one feel : ' Krishna has become all these. He alone is the Supreme Brahman. He is Rama, Siva, and Sakti.' But this element of knowledge is not present in ecstatic love of God. Once Hanuman came to Dwaraka and wanted to see Sita and Rama. Krishna said to Rukmini, His queen, ' You had better assume the form of Sita ; otherwise there will be no escape from the hands of Hanuman.'⁹"

" Once the Pandava brothers performed the Rajasuya sacrifice. All the kings placed Yudhisthira on the royal throne and bowed low before him in homage. But Bibhishana, the King of Ceylon, said, ' I bow down to Narayana and to none else.' At these words the Lord Krishna bowed down to

⁷ The song represents Sri Krishna's words.

⁸ One of the gopis of Vrindavan.

⁹ An allusion to the story of Vali, narrated in the Purana. He was punished by the Lord for his excessive charity and was condemned to rule over the nether world. But he succeeded in extracting from the Lord the boon that He would be his doorkeeper.

¹⁰ Because Rama and Sita were Hanuman's Chosen Ideals.

Yudhisthira. Only then did Bibhishana prostrate himself, crown and all, before him.

"Do you know what devotion to one ideal is like? It is like the attitude of a daughter-in-law in the family. She serves all the members of the family--her brothers-in-law, father-in-law, husband, and so forth--, bringing them water to wash their feet, fetching their towels, arranging their seats, and the like; but with her husband she has a special relationship.

"There are two elements in this ecstatic love: 'I-ness' and 'my-ness'. Yasoda used to think: 'Who would look after Gopala if I did not? He will fall ill if I do not serve Him.' She did not look on Krishna as God. The other element is 'my-ness'. It means to look on God as one's own--'my Gopala.' Uddhava said to Yasoda: 'Mother, your Krishna is God Himself. He is the Lord of the Universe and not a common human being.' 'Oh!' exclaimed Yasoda. 'I am not asking you about your Lord of the Universe. I want to know how *my* Gopala fares. Not the Lord of the Universe, but *my* Gopala.'

"How faithful to Krishna the gopis were! After many entreaties to the door-keeper, the gopis entered the royal court in Mathura, where Krishna was seated as king. The door-keeper took them to Him; but at the sight of King Krishna wearing the royal turban, the gopis bent down their heads and said among themselves: 'Who is this man with a turban on his head? Should we violate our chaste love for Krishna by talking to him? Where is our beloved Krishna with the yellow robe and the bewitching crest with the peacock feather?'

"Did you observe the single-minded love of the gopis for Krishna? The ideal of Vrindavan is unique. I am told that the people of Dwaraka worship Krishna, the companion of Arjuna, but reject Radha."

A DEVOTEE: "Which is the better, ecstatic love or love mixed with knowledge?"

MASTER: "It is not possible to develop ecstatic love of God unless you love Him very deeply and regard Him as your very own."

"Listen to a story. Once three friends were going through a forest, when a tiger suddenly appeared before them. 'Brothers,' one of them exclaimed, 'we are lost!' 'Why should you say that?' said the second friend. 'Why should we be lost? Come, let us pray to God.' The third friend said: 'No. Why should we trouble God about it? Come, let us climb this tree.'

"The friend who said, 'We are lost!' did not know that there is a God who is our Protector. The friend who asked the others to pray to God was a jnani. He was aware that God is the Creator, Preserver, and Destroyer of the world. The third friend, who didn't want to trouble God with prayers and suggested climbing the tree, had ecstatic love of God. It is the very nature of such love that it makes a man think himself stronger than his Beloved. He is always alert lest his Beloved should suffer. The one desire of his life is to keep his Beloved from even being pricked in the foot by a thorn."

Ram served the Master and the devotees with delicious sweets.

XI

WITH THE DEVOTEES AT DAKSHINESWAR (I)

Monday, June 4, 1883

ABOUT NINE O'CLOCK in the morning the devotees began to arrive at the temple garden. Sri Ramakrishna was sitting on the porch of his room facing the Ganges. M., who had spent the previous night with the Master, sat near him. Balaram and several other devotees were present. Rakhal lay on the floor, resting his head on the Master's lap. For the past few days the Master had been regarding Rakhal as the Baby Krishna.

Seeing Trailokya¹ passing on his way to the Kali temple, Sri Ramakrishna asked Rakhal to get up. Trailokya bowed to the Master.

MASTER (*to Trailokya*) : "Was there no yatra performance last night ?"²
TRAILOKYA : "No, sir. We couldn't conveniently arrange it."

MASTER : "What is done is done. But please see that this doesn't happen again. The traditions of the temple should be properly observed."

Trailokya gave a suitable reply and went on his way. After a while Ram Chatterji, the priest of the Vishnu temple, came up to Sri Ramakrishna.

MASTER : "Well, Ram, I told Trailokya that the yatra performance should not be omitted again. Was I right in saying that ?"

RAM : "What of it, sir ? Of course you were right. The traditions should be observed."

The Master asked Balaram to stay for his midday meal. Before the meal Sri Ramakrishna described to the devotees the days of his God-intoxication. Rakhal, M., Ramlal, and a few others were present.

MASTER : "Now and then Hazra comes forward to teach me. He says to me, 'Why do you think so much about the youngsters ?' One day, as I was going to Balaram's house in a carriage, I felt greatly troubled about it. I said to the Divine Mother : 'Mother, Hazra admonishes me for worrying about Narendra and the other young boys. He asks me why I forget God and think about these youngsters.' No sooner did this thought arise in my mind than the Divine Mother revealed to me in a flash that it is She Herself who

¹ The son of Mathur and grandson of Rani Rasmani. He had become proprietor of the temple in 1871.

² A special worship of the Divine Mother had taken place that night in the Kali temple. On similar occasions in previous years the proprietors of the temple had arranged the performance of the yatra.

has become man. But she manifests Herself most clearly through a pure soul. At this vision I went into samadhi. Afterwards I felt angry with Hazra. I said to myself, 'That rascal made me miserable.' Then I thought : 'But why should I blame the poor man ? How is he to know ?'

"I know these youngsters to be Narayana Himself. At my first meeting with Narendra I found him completely indifferent to his body. When I touched his chest with my hand, he lost consciousness of the outer world. Regaining consciousness, Narendra said : 'Oh, what have you done to me ? I have my father and mother at home !' The same thing happened at Jadu Mallick's house. As the days passed I longed more and more to see him. My heart yearned for him. One day at that time I said to Bholanath : 'Can you tell me why I should feel this way ? There is a boy called Narendra, of the kayastha caste. Why should I feel so restless for him ?' Bholanath said : 'You will find the explanation in the *Mahabharata*. On coming down to the plane of ordinary consciousness, a man established in samadhi enjoys himself in the company of sattvic people. He feels peace of mind at the sight of such men.' When I heard this my mind was set at ease. Now and then I would sit alone and weep for the sight of Narendra.

"Oh, what a state of mind I passed through ! When I first had that experience, I could not perceive the coming and going of day or night. People said I was insane. What else could they say ? They made me marry. I was then in a state of God-intoxication. At first I felt worried about my wife. Then I thought she too would eat and drink and live like me.

"I visited my father-in-law's house. They arranged a kirtan. It was a great religious festival, and there was much singing of God's holy name. Now and then I would wonder about my future. I would say to the Divine Mother, 'Mother, I shall take my spiritual experiences to be real if the landlords of the country show me respect.' They too came of their own accord and talked with me.

"Oh, what an ecstatic state it was ! Even the slightest suggestion would awaken my spiritual consciousness. I worshipped the 'Beautiful' in a girl fourteen years old. I saw that she was the personification of the Divine Mother. At the end of the worship I bowed before her and offered a rupee at her feet. One day I witnessed a Ramlila performance. I saw the performers to be the actual Sita, Rama, Lakshmana, Hanuman, and Bibhishana. Then I worshipped the actors and actresses who played those parts.

"At that time I used to invite maidens here and worship them. I found them to be embodiments of the Divine Mother Herself.

"One day I saw a woman in blue standing near the bakul-tree. She was a prostitute. But she instantly kindled in me the vision of Sita. I forgot the woman. I saw that it was Sita herself on her way to meet Rama after her rescue from Ravana in Ceylon. For a long time I remained in samadhi, unconscious of the outer world.

"Another day I had gone to the Maidan in Calcutta for fresh air. A great crowd had assembled there to watch a balloon ascension. Suddenly I saw an

¹ A clerk at the Dakshineswar temple garden.



SWAMI VIVEKANANDA (NARENDRANATH)
as a wandering monk after Sri Ramakrishna's passing away

English boy leaning against a tree. As he stood there his body was bent in three places. The vision of Krishna came before me in a flash. I went into samadhi.

"Once, at Sihore, I fed the cowherd boys. I put sweetmeats into their hands. I saw that these boys were actually the cowherd boys of Vrindavan, and I partook of the sweetmeats from their hands.

"At that time I was almost unconscious of the outer world. Mathur Babu kept me at his Janbazar mansion a few days. While living there I regarded myself as the handmaid of the Divine Mother. The ladies of the house didn't feel at all bashful with me. They felt as free before me as women feel before a small boy or girl. I used to escort Mathur's daughter to her husband's chamber with the maidservant.

"Even now the slightest thing awakens God-Consciousness in me. Rakhal used to repeat the name of God half aloud. At such times I couldn't control myself. It would rouse my spiritual consciousness and overwhelm me."

Sri Ramakrishna went on describing the different experiences he had had while worshipping the Divine Mother as Her handmaid. He said : "Once I imitated a professional woman singer for a man singer. He said my acting was quite correct and asked me where I had learnt it." The Master repeated his imitation for the devotees, and they burst into laughter.

After his noon meal the Master took a short rest. Manilal Mallick, an old member of the Brahmo Samaj, entered the room and sat down after saluting the Master, who was still lying on his bed. Manilal asked him questions now and then, and the Master, still half asleep, answered with a word or two. Manilal said that Shivanath admired Nityagopal's spiritual state. The Master asked in a sleepy tone what they thought of Hazra.

Then Sri Ramakrishna sat up on his bed and told Manilal about Bhavanath's devotion to God.

MASTER : "Ah, what an exalted state he is in ! He has hardly begun to sing about God before his eyes fill with tears. The very sight of Harish made him ecstatic. He said that Harish was very lucky. He made the remark because Harish was spending a few days here, now and then, away from his home."

Sri Ramakrishna asked M. : "Well, what is the cause of bhakti ? Why should the spiritual feeling of young boys like Bhavanath be awakened ?" M. remained silent.

MASTER : "The fact is, all men may look alike from the outside, but some of them have fillings of 'condensed milk'. Cakes may have fillings of condensed milk or powdered black grams, but they all look alike from the outside. The desire to know God, ecstatic love of Him, and such other spiritual qualities are the 'condensed milk'."

Sri Ramakrishna spoke reassuringly to the devotees.

MASTER (*to M.*) : "Some think : 'Oh, I am a bound soul. I shall never acquire knowledge and devotion.' But if one receives the guru's grace, one has nothing to fear. Once a tigress attacked a flock of goats. As she sprang on her prey, she gave birth to a cub and died. The cub grew up in the

company of the goats. The goats ate grass and the cub followed their example. They bleated ; the cub bleated too. Gradually it grew to be a big tiger. One day another tiger attacked the same flock. It was amazed to see the grass-eating tiger. Running after it, the wild tiger at last seized it, whereupon the grass-eating tiger began to bleat. The wild tiger dragged it to the water and said : 'Look at your face in the water. It is just like mine. Here is a little meat. Eat it.' Saying this, it thrust some meat into its mouth. But the grass-eating tiger would not swallow it and began to bleat again. Gradually, however, it got the taste for blood and came to relish the meat. Then the wild tiger said : 'Now you see there is no difference between you and me. Come along and follow me into the forest.'

"So there can be no fear if the guru's grace descends on one. He will let you know who you are and what your real nature is.

"If the devotee practises spiritual discipline a little, the guru explains everything to him. Then the disciple understands for himself what is real and what is unreal. God alone is real, and the world is illusory.

"One night a fisherman went into a garden and cast his net into the lake in order to steal some fish. The owner heard him and surrounded him with his servants. They brought lighted torches and began to search for him. In the mean time the fisherman smeared his body with ashes and sat under a tree, pretending to be a holy man. The owner and his men searched a great deal but could not find the thief. All they saw was a holy man covered with ashes, meditating under a tree. The next day the news spread in the neighbourhood that a great sage was staying in the garden. People gathered there and saluted him with offerings of fruit, flowers, and sweets. Many also offered silver and copper coins. 'How strange !' thought the fisherman. 'I am not a genuine holy man, and still people show such devotion to me. I shall certainly realize God if I become a true sadhu. There is no doubt about it.'

"If a mere pretence of religious life can bring such spiritual awakening, you can imagine the effect of real sadhana. In that state you will surely realize what is real and what is unreal. God alone is real, and the world is illusory."

One of the devotees said to himself : "Is the world unreal, then ? The fisherman, to be sure, renounced worldly life. What, then, will happen to those who live in the world ? Must they too renounce it ?" Sri Ramakrishna, who could see into a man's innermost thought, said very tenderly : "Suppose an office clerk has been sent to jail. He undoubtedly leads a prisoner's life there. But when he is released from jail, does he cut capers in the street ? Not at all. He gets a job as a clerk again and goes on working as before. Even after attaining Knowledge through the guru's grace, one can very well live in the world as a jivanmukta." Thus did Sri Ramakrishna reassure those who were living as householders.

MANILAL : "Sir, where shall I meditate on God when I perform my daily worship ?"

MASTER : "Why, the heart is a splendid place. Meditate on God there."

Manilal, a member of the Brahmo Samaj, believed in a formless God. Addressing him, the Master said : "Kabir used to say : 'God with form is my

Mother, the formless God my Father. Whom should I blame? Whom should I adore? The two sides of the scales are even.' During the day-time Haladhari used to meditate on God with form, and at night on the formless God. Whichever attitude you adopt, you will certainly realize God if you have firm faith. You may believe in God with form or in God without form, but your faith must be sincere and whole-hearted. Sambhu Mallick used to come on foot from Baghbazar to his garden house at Dakshineswar. One day a friend said to him : 'It is risky to walk such a long distance. Why don't you come in a carriage?' At that Sambhu's face turned red and he exclaimed : 'I set out repeating the name of God! What danger can befall me?' Through faith alone one attains everything. I used to say, 'I shall take all this' to be true if I meet a certain person or if a certain officer of the temple garden talks to me.' What I would think of would invariably come to pass."

M. had studied English logic. In the chapters on fallacies he had read that only superstitious people believed in the coincidence of morning dreams with actual events. Therefore he asked the Master, "Was there never any exception?"

MASTER : "No. At that time everything happened that way. I would repeat the name of God and believe that a certain thing would happen, and it would invariably come to pass. (*To Manilal*) But you must remember, unless one is guileless and broad-minded, one cannot have such faith. Bony people, the hollow-eyed, the cross-eyed—people with physical traits like those cannot easily acquire faith. What can a man do if there are evil omens on all sides?"

It was dusk. The maidservant entered the room and burnt incense. Manilal and some other devotees left for Calcutta. M. and Rakhal were in the room. The Master was seated on his small couch absorbed in meditation on the Divine Mother. There was complete silence.

After a time Bhagavati, an old maidservant of the temple proprietor, entered the room and saluted the Master from a distance. Sri Ramakrishna bade her sit down. The Master had known her for many years. In her younger days she had lived a rather immoral life; but the Master's compassion was great. Soon he began to converse with her.

MASTER : "Now you are pretty old. Have you been feeding the Vaishnavas and holy men, and thus spending your money in a noble way?"

BHAGAVATI (*smiling*) : "How can I say that?"

MASTER : "Have you been to Vrindavan, Benares, and the other holy places?"

BHAGAVATI (*shrinkingly*) : "How can I say that?—I have built a bathing-place, and my name is inscribed there on a slab."

MASTER : "Indeed!"

BHAGAVATI : "Yes, sir. My name, 'Srimati Bhagavati Dasi', is written there."

MASTER (*with a smile*) : "How nice!"

¹ His spiritual experiences.

² She meant "yes". In India it is customary not to mention one's meritorious deeds.

Emboldened by the Master's words, Bhagavati approached and saluted him, touching his feet. Like a man stung by a scorpion, Sri Ramakrishna stood up and cried out, "Govinda! Govinda!" A big jar of Ganges water stood in a corner of the room. He hurried there, panting, and washed with the holy water the spot the maid-servant had touched. The devotees in the room were amazed to see this incident. Bhagavati sat as if struck dead.

Sri Ramakrishna consoled her and said in a very kindly tone, "You should salute me from a distance." In order to relieve her mind of all embarrassment, the Master said tenderly, "Listen to a few songs."

The Master then sang about the Divine Mother :

The black bee of my mind is drawn in sheer delight
To the blue lotus flower of Mother Syama's feet. . . .

Then he sang :

High in the heaven of the Mother's feet, my mind was soaring like
a kite.
When came a gust of sin's rough wind that drove it swiftly toward
the earth. . . .

Again :

Dwell, O mind, within yourself :
Enter no other's home.
If you but seek there, you will find
All you are searching for.

God, the true Philosopher's Stone,
Who answers every prayer,
Lies hidden deep within your heart,
The richest gem of all.

How many pearls and precious stones
Are scattered all about
The outer court that lies before
The chamber of your heart !

Tuesday, June 5, 1883

Rakhal and Hazra were staying with the Master in the temple garden at Dakshineswar. M., too, had been there since the previous Sunday. As it was a week-day there were only a few devotees in the room. Generally people gathered there in large numbers on Sundays or holidays.

It was afternoon. Sri Ramakrishna was telling the devotees about his experiences during his God-intoxicated state.

MASTER (*to M.*) : "Oh, what a state I passed through ! At that time I didn't eat my meals here. I would enter the house of a brahmin in the village or at Baranagore or at Ariadaha. Generally it would be past meal-time. I would just sit down there without saying a word. If the members of the household asked me why I had come, I would simply say, 'I want something to eat.' Now and then I would go, uninvited of course, to Ram Chatterji's house at Alambazar or to the Choudhurys at Dakshineswar. But I didn't relish the food at the Choudhury's house.

"One day I begged Mathur to take me to Devendra Tagore's house. I said : 'Devendra chants the name of God. I want to see him. Will you take me there ?' Mathur Babu was a very proud man. How could one expect him to go to another man's house uninvited ? At first he hesitated. But then he said : 'All right. Devendra and I were fellow students. I will take you to him.'

"Another day I learnt of a good man named Dina Mukherji, living at Baghbazar near the bridge. He was a devotee. I asked Mathur to take me there. Finding me insistent, he took me to Dina's house in a carriage. It was a small place. The arrival of a rich man in a big carriage embarrassed the inmates. We too were embarrassed. That day Dina's son was being invested with the sacred thread. The house was crowded, and there was hardly any place for Dina to receive us. We were about to enter a side room, when someone cried out : 'Please don't go into that room. There are ladies there.' It was really a distressing situation. Returning, Mathur Babu said, 'Father, I shall never listen to you again.' I laughed.

"Oh, what a state I passed through ! Once Kumar Singh gave a feast to the sadhus and invited me too. I found a great many holy men assembled there. When I sat down for the meal, several sadhus asked me about myself. At once I felt like leaving them and sitting alone. I wondered why they should bother about all that. The sadhus took their seats. I began to eat before they had started. I heard several of them remark, 'Oh ! What sort of man is this ?'"

It was about five o'clock in the afternoon. Sri Ramakrishna was sitting on the steps of his verandah. Hazra, Rakhal, and M. were near him. Hazra had the attitude of a Vedantist : "I am He."

MASTER (to Hazra) : "Yes, all one's confusion comes to an end if one only realizes that it is God who manifests Himself as the atheist and the believer, the good and the bad, the real and the unreal ; that it is He who is present in waking and in sleep ; and that He is beyond all these."

"There was a farmer to whom an only son was born when he was rather advanced in age. As the child grew up, his parents became very fond of him. One day the farmer was out working in the fields, when a neighbour told him that his son was dangerously ill—indeed, at the point of death. Returning home he found the boy dead. His wife wept bitterly, but his own eyes remained dry. Sadly the wife said to her neighbours, 'Such a son has passed away, and he hasn't even one tear to shed !' After a long while the farmer said to his wife : 'Do you know why I am not crying ? Last night I dreamt I had become a king, and the father of seven princes. These princes were beautiful as well as virtuous. They grew in stature and acquired wisdom and knowledge in the various arts. Suddenly I woke up. Now I have been wondering whether I should weep for those seven children or this one boy.' To the jnanis the waking state is no more real than the dream state.

"God alone is the Doer. Everything happens by His will."

HAZRA : "But it is very difficult to understand that. Take the case of the sadhu of Bhukailas. How people tortured him and, in a way, killed

him! They had found him in samadhi. First they buried him, then they put him under water, and then they branded him with a hot iron. Thus they brought him back to consciousness of the world. But in the end the sadhu died as a result of these tortures. He undoubtedly suffered at the hands of men, though, as you say, he died by the will of God."

MASTER : " Man must reap the fruit of his own karma. But as far as the death of that holy man is concerned, it was brought about by the will of God. The kavirajs prepare makaradhvaja⁶ in a bottle. The bottle is covered with clay and heated in the fire. The gold inside the bottle melts and combines with the other ingredients, and the medicine is made. Then the physicians break the bottle carefully and take out the medicine. When the medicine is made, what difference does it make whether the bottle is preserved or broken? So people think that the holy man was killed. But perhaps his inner stuff had been made. After the realization of God, what difference does it make whether the body lives or dies ? "

" The sadhu of Bhukailas was in samadhi. There are many kinds of samadhi. My own spiritual experiences tally with the words I heard from a sadhu of Hrishikesh. Sometimes I feel the rising of the spiritual current inside me, as though it were the creeping of an ant. Sometimes it feels like the movement of a monkey jumping from one branch to another. Again, sometimes it feels like a fish swimming in water. Only he who experiences it knows what it is like. In samadhi one forgets the world. When the mind comes down a little, I say to the Divine Mother : ' Mother, please cure me of this. I want to talk to people. '

" None but the Isvarakotis can return to the plane of relative consciousness after attaining samadhi. Some ordinary men attain samadhi through spiritual discipline ; but they do not come back. But when God Himself is born as a man, as an Incarnation, holding in His hand the key to others' liberation, then for the welfare of humanity the Incarnation returns from samadhi to consciousness of the world."

M. (*to himself*) : " Does the Master hold in his hand the key to man's liberation ? " .

HAZRA : " The one thing needful is to please God. What does it matter whether an Incarnation of God exists or not ? "

It was the day of the new moon. Gradually night descended and dense darkness enveloped the trees and the temples. A few lights shone here and there in the temple garden. The black sky was reflected in the waters of the Ganges.

The Master went to the verandah south of his room. A spiritual mood was the natural state of his mind. The dark night of the new moon, associated with the black complexion of Kali, the Divine Mother, intensified his spiritual exaltation. Now and then he repeated " Om " and the name of Kali. He lay down on a mat and whispered to M.

⁶ An Indian medicine made of mercury and sulphur, in the preparation of which gold acts as a catalytic agent.

MASTER : "Yes, God can be seen. X— has had a vision of God. But don't tell anyone about it. Tell me, which do you like better, God with form, or the formless Reality ? "

M : "Sir, nowadays I like to think of God without form. But I am also beginning to understand that it is God alone who manifests Himself through different forms."

MASTER : "Will you take me in a carriage some day to Mati Seal's garden house at Belgharia ? When you throw puffed rice into the lake there, the fish come to the surface and eat it. Ah ! I feel so happy to see them sport in the water. That will awaken your spiritual consciousness too. You will feel as if the fish of the human soul were playing in the Ocean of Satchidananda. In the same manner, I go into an ecstatic mood when I stand in a big meadow. I feel like a fish released from a bowl into a lake."

"Spiritual discipline is necessary in order to see God. I had to pass through very severe discipline. How many austerities I practised under the bel-tree ! I would lie down under it, crying to the Divine Mother, 'O Mother, reveal Thyself to me.' The tears would flow in torrents and soak my body."

M : "You practised so many austerities, but people expect to realize God in a moment ! Can a man build a wall simply by moving his finger around his home ? "

MASTER (*with a smile*) : "Amrita says that one man lights a fire and ten bask in its heat. I want to tell you something else. It is good to remain on the plane of the Lila after reaching the Nitya."

M : "You once said that one comes down to the plane of the Lila in order to enjoy the divine play."

MASTER : "No, not exactly that. The Lila is real too.

"Let me tell you something. Whenever you come here, bring a trifle with you. Perhaps I shouldn't say it ; it may look like egotism. I also told Adhar Sen that he should bring a pennyworth of something with him. I asked Bhavanath to bring a pennyworth of betel-leaf. Have you noticed Bhavanath's devotion ? Narendra and he seem like man and woman. He is devoted to Narendra. Bring Narendra here with you in a carriage, and also bring some sweets with you. It will do you good.

"Knowledge and love—both are paths leading to God. Those who follow the path of love have to observe a little more outer purity. But the violation of this by a man following the path of knowledge cannot injure him. It is destroyed in the fire of knowledge. Even a banana tree is burnt up when it is thrown into a roaring fire.

"The jnanis follow the path of discrimination. Sometimes it happens that, discriminating between the Real and the unreal, a man loses his faith in the existence of God. But a devotee who sincerely yearns for God does not give up his meditation even though he is invaded by atheistic ideas. A man

¹ The Hindu scriptures command the householder to visit a holy man with suitable presents.

whose father and grandfather have been farmers continues his farming even though he doesn't get any crop in a year of drought."

Lying on the mat and resting his head on a pillow, Sri Ramakrishna continued the conversation. He said to M : " My legs are aching. Please stroke them gently." Thus, out of his infinite compassion, the Master allowed his disciple to render him personal service.

June 8, 1883

It was a summer day. The evening service in the Kali temple was over. Sri Ramakrishna stood before the image of the Divine Mother and waved the fan a few minutes.

Ram, Kedar Chatterji, and Tarak arrived from Calcutta with flowers and sweets. Kedar was about fifty years old. At first he had frequented the Brahmo Samaj and joined other religious sects in his search for God, but later on he had accepted the Master as his spiritual guide. He was an accountant in a government office and lived in a suburb of Calcutta.

Tarak was a young man of twenty-four. His wife had died shortly after their marriage. He hailed from the village of Barasat not far from Calcutta. His father, a highly spiritual soul, had visited Sri Ramakrishna many times. Tarak often went to Ram's house and used to go to Dakshineswar in the company of Ram and Nityagopal. He worked in a business firm, but his attitude toward the world was one of utter indifference.

As Sri Ramakrishna came out of the temple, he saw Ram, Kedar, M., Tarak, and other devotees standing outside. He showed his affection for Tarak by touching his chin. He was very happy to see him.

Returning to his room, the Master sat on the floor in an ecstatic mood, with his legs stretched before him. Ram and Kedar decorated his feet with flowers and garlands. The Master was in samadhi.

Kedar believed in certain queer practices of a religious sect to which he had once belonged. He held the Master's big toe in his hand, believing that in this way the Master's spiritual power would be transmitted to him. As Sri Ramakrishna regained partial consciousness, he said, "Mother, what can he do to me by holding my toe ?" Kedar sat humbly with folded hands. Still in an ecstatic mood, the Master said to Kedar : " Your mind is still attracted by 'woman and gold'. What is the use of saying you don't care for it ? Go forward. Beyond the forest of sandal-wood there are many more things : mines of silver, gold, diamonds, and other precious stones. Having a glimpse of spirituality, don't think you have attained everything." The Master was again in an ecstatic mood. He said to the Divine Mother, " Mother, take him away." At these words Kedar's throat dried up. In a frightened tone he said to Ram, " What is the Master saying ?"

At the sight of Rakhal, Sri Ramakrishna was again overpowered with a spiritual mood. He said to his beloved disciple : " I have been here many days. When did you come ?"

Was the Master hinting that he was an Incarnation of God, and Rakhal his divine companion, a member of the inner circle of devotees ?

Sunday, June 10, 1883

The Master was sitting in his room with Rakhal, M., Latu, Kishori, Ramlal, Hazra, and other devotees. It was about ten o'clock in the morning.

Describing his early life, Sri Ramakrishna said to them : " During my younger days the men and women of Kamarpukur were equally fond of me. They loved to hear me sing. I could imitate other people's gestures and conversation, and I used to entertain them that way. The women would put aside things for me to eat. No one distrusted me. Everybody took me in as one of the family.

" But I was like a happy pigeon. I used to frequent only happy families. I would run away from a place where I saw misery and suffering.

" One or two young boys of the village were my close friends. I was very intimate with some of them ; but now they are totally immersed in worldliness. A few of them visit me here now and then and say, ' Goodness ! He seems to be just the same as he was in the village school ! ' While I was at school, arithmetic would throw me into confusion, but I could paint very well and could also model small images of the deities.

" I loved to visit the free eating-places maintained for holy men and the poor, and would watch them for hours.

" I loved to hear the reading of sacred books such as the *Ramayana* and *Bhagavata*. If the readers had any affectations, I could easily imitate them and would entertain others with my mimicry.

" I understood the behaviour of women very well and imitated their words and intonations. I could easily recognize immoral women. Immoral widows part their hair in the middle and perform their toilet with great care. They have very little modesty. The way they sit is so different ! But let's not talk of worldly things any more."

The Master asked Ramlal to sing. Ramlal sang :

Who is this terrible Woman, dark as the sky at midnight ?
 Who is this Woman dancing over the field of battle,
 Like a blue lotus that floats on a crimson sea of blood ?
 Who is She, clad alone in the Infinite for a garment,
 Rolling Her three great eyes in frenzy and savage fury ?
 Under the weight of Her tread the earth itself is trembling !
 Siva, Her mighty Husband, who yields the fearful trident,
 Lies like a lifeless corpse beneath Her conquering feet.

The next song described the grief of Mandodari at the death of her husband Ravana. As he listened to it the Master shed tears of sorrow and said : " Once, when I entered the pine-grove over there, I heard the boatmen on the Ganges singing that song and wept bitterly for a long time. I had to be brought back to my room."

Ramlal sang about the love of the gopis for Sri Krishna. Akrura was about to drive Sri Krishna in a chariot from Vrindavan to Mathura. The gopis would not let Him go. Some held the wheels of the chariot ; some lay down in front of it. They blamed Akrura, not knowing that Sri Krishna was leaving them of His own will. Akrura was explaining this to the gopis.

Ramial sang :

Hold not, hold not the chariot's wheels !
Is it the wheels that make it move ?
The Mover of its wheels is Krishna,
By whose will the worlds are moved. . . .

About the gopis, the Master said : "What deep love, what ecstatic devotion they had for Krishna ! Radha painted the picture of Sri Krishna with her own hand, but did not paint His legs lest He should run away to Mathura ! I used to sing these songs very often during my boyhood. I could reproduce the whole drama from memory."

After his meal Sri Ramakrishna sat on the couch. He had not yet found time to rest. The devotees began to assemble. One party arrived from Manirampur and another from Belgharia. Some of the devotees said, "We have disturbed your rest."

MASTER : "Oh, no ! What you say applies only to a rajaistic man. About him people say, 'Ah, now he will enjoy his sleep.'"

The devotees from Manirampur asked the Master how to realize God.

MASTER : "You must practise spiritual discipline a little. It will not do simply to say that milk contains butter. You must let the milk set into curd and then churn it. Only then can you get butter from it. Spiritual aspirants must go into solitude now and then. After acquiring love of God in solitude, they may live in the world. If one is wearing a pair of shoes, one can easily walk over thorns.

" The most important thing is faith.

As is a man's meditation, so is his feeling of love ;
As is a man's feeling of love, so is his gain ;
And faith is the root of all.

If one has faith one has nothing to fear."

A DEVOTEE : "Sir, is it necessary to have a guru ?"

MASTER : "Yes, many need a guru. But a man must have faith in the guru's words. He succeeds in spiritual life by looking on his guru as God Himself. Therefore the Vaishnavas speak of Guru, Krishna, and Vaishnava."

"One should constantly repeat the name of God. The name of God is highly effective in the Kaliyuga. The practice of yoga is not possible in this age, for the life of a man depends on food. Clap your hands while repeating God's name, and the birds of your sin will fly away.

"One should always seek the company of holy men. The nearer you approach the Ganges, the cooler the breeze will feel. Again, the nearer you go to a fire, the hotter the air will feel.

"But one cannot achieve anything through laziness and procrastination. People who desire worldly enjoyment say about spiritual progress : 'Well, it will all happen in time. We shall realize God some time or other.'

* The Master meant that the guru, Krishna, and the Vaishnava were to be equally revered. One should honour the Vaishnava because God dwells in his heart.

• "I said to Keshab Sen : 'When a father sees that his son has become restless for his inheritance, he gives him his share of the property even three years before the legal time. A mother keeps on cooking while the baby is in bed sucking its toy. But when it throws the toy away and cries for her, she puts down the rice-pot and takes the baby in her arms and nurses it.' I said all this to Keshab.

" It is said that, in the Kaliyuga, if a man can weep for God one day and one night, he sees Him.

" Feel piqued at God and say to Him : ' You have created me. Now You must reveal Yourself to me.' Whether you live in the world or elsewhere, always fix your mind on God. The mind soaked in worldliness may be compared to a wet match-stick. You won't get a spark, however much you may rub it. Ekalavya placed the clay image of Drona, his teacher, in front of him and thus learnt archery."

" Go forward. The wood-cutter, following the instructions of the holy man, went forward and found in the forest sandal-wood and mines of silver and gold ; and going still farther, he found diamonds and other precious stones.

" The ignorant are like people living in a house with clay walls. There is very little light inside, and they cannot see outside at all. But those who enter the world after attaining the Knowledge of God are like people living in a house made of glass. For them both inside and outside are light. They can see things outside as well as inside.

" Nothing exists except the One. That One is the Supreme Brahman. So long as He keeps the 'I' in us, He reveals to us that it is He who, as the Primal Energy, creates, preserves, and destroys the universe.

" That which is Brahman is also the Primal Energy. Once a king asked a yogi to impart Knowledge to him in one word. The yogi said, ' All right ; you will get Knowledge in one word.' After a while a magician came to the king. The king saw the magician moving two of his fingers rapidly and heard him exclaim, ' Behold, O King ! Behold.' The king looked at him amazed when, after a few minutes, he saw the two fingers becoming one. The magician moved that one finger rapidly and said, ' Behold, O King ! Behold.' The implication of the story is that Brahman and the Primal Energy at first appear to be two. But after attaining the Knowledge of Brahman one does not see the two. Then there is no differentiation ; it is One, without a second—Advaita—non-duality."

The Master was very happy to see a musician who had come with the devotees from Belgharia. Some time before, Sri Ramakrishna had gone into an ecstatic mood on hearing his devotional music. At the Master's request the musician sang a few songs, one of which described the awakening of the Kundalini and the six centres :

⁹ The story is in the *Mahabharata*. Drona refused to teach Ekalavya archery because the latter belonged to a low caste. Thereupon Ekalavya went to the forest and practised archery before the clay image of Drona, whom he regarded as his teacher. In course of time he became an expert archer. When Drona discovered that he excelled even Arjuna, Drona's most beloved disciple, in this art, he asked Ekalavya to give him his thumb as the teacher's fee. By carrying out this order, Ekalavya demonstrated his spirit of self-sacrifice and also his love for his teacher.

Awake, Mother ! Awake ! How long Thou hast been asleep
 In the lotus of the Muladhara !
 Fulfil Thy secret function, Mother :
 Rise to the thousand-petalled lotus within the head,
 Where mighty Siva has His dwelling ;
 Swiftly pierce the six lotuses
 And take away my grief, O Essence of Consciousness !

MASTER : "The song speaks of the Kundalini's passing through the six centres. God is both within and without. From within He creates the various states of mind. After passing through the six centres, the jiva goes beyond the realm of maya and becomes united with the Supreme Soul. This is the vision of God.

¶ One cannot see God unless maya steps aside from the door.' Rama, Lakshmana, and Sita were walking together. Rama was in front, Sita walked in the middle, and Lakshmana followed them. But Lakshmana could not see Rama because Sita was between them. In like manner, man cannot see God because maya is between them. (To Mani Mallick) But maya steps aside from the door when God shows His grace to the devotee. When the visitor stands before the door, the door-keeper says to the master, 'Sir, command us, and we shall let him pass.'

"There are two schools of thought : the Vedanta and the Purana. According to the Vedanta this world is a 'framework of illusion', that is to say, it is all illusory, like a dream. But according to the Purana, the books of devotion, God Himself has become the twenty-four cosmic principles. Worship God both within and without.

"As long as God keeps the awareness of 'I' in us, so long do sense-objects exist ; and we cannot very well speak of the world as a dream. There is fire in the hearth ; therefore the rice and pulse and potatoes and the other vegetables jump about in the pot. They jump about as if to say : 'We are here ! We are jumping !' This body is the pot. The mind and intelligence are the water. The objects of the senses are the rice, potatoes, and other vegetables. The 'I-consciousness' identified with the senses says, 'I am jumping about.' And Satchidananda is the fire.

"Hence the Bhakti scriptures describe this very world as a 'mansion of mirth'. Ramprasad sang in one of his songs, 'This world is a framework of illusion.' Another devotee gave the reply, 'This very world is a mansion of mirth.' As the saying goes, 'The devotee of Kali, free while living, is full of Eternal Bliss.' The bhakta sees that He who is God has also become maya. Again, He Himself has become the universe and all its living beings. The bhakta sees God, maya, the universe, and the living beings as one. Some devotees see everything as Rama : it is Rama alone who has become everything. Some see everything as Radha and Krishna. To them it is Krishna alone who has become the twenty-four cosmic principles. It is like seeing everything green through green glasses.

"But the Bhakti scriptures admit that the manifestations of Power are different in different beings. It is Rama who has become everything, no doubt ;

but He manifests Himself more in some than in others. There is one kind of manifestation of Rama in the Incarnation of God, and another in men. Even the Incarnations are conscious of the body. Embodiment is due to maya. Rama wept for Sita. But the Incarnation of God puts a bandage over His eyes by His own will, like children playing blindman's buff. The children stop playing when their mother calls them. It is quite different, however, with the ordinary man. The cloth his eyes are bandaged with is fastened to his back with screws, as it were. There are eight fetters. Shame, hatred, fear, caste, lineage, good conduct, grief, and secretiveness—these are the eight fetters. And they cannot be unfastened without the help of a guru."

A DEVOTEE : "Sir, please bless us."

MASTER : "God is in all beings. But you must apply to the Gas Company. It will connect the storage-tank with the pipe in your house.

"One must pray earnestly. It is said that one can realize God by directing to Him the combined intensity of three attractions, namely, the child's attraction for the mother, the husband's attraction for the chaste wife, and the attraction of worldly possessions for the worldly man.

"There are certain signs by which you can know a true devotee of God. His mind becomes quiet as he listens to his teacher's instruction, just as the poisonous snake is quieted by the music of the charmer. I don't mean the cobra. There is another sign. A real devotee develops the power of assimilating instruction. An image cannot be impressed on bare glass, but only on glass stained with a black solution, as in photography. The black solution is devotion to God. There is a third sign of a true devotee. The true devotee has controlled his senses. He has subdued his lust. The gopis were free from lust.

"You are talking about your leading a householder's life. Suppose you are a householder. It rather helps in the practice of spiritual discipline. It is like fighting from inside a fort. The Tantriks sometimes use a corpse in their religious rites. Now and then the dead body frightens them by opening its mouth. That is why they keep fried rice and grams near them, and from time to time they throw some of the grains into the corpse's mouth. Thus pacifying the corpse, they repeat the name of the Deity without any worry. Likewise, the householder should pacify his wife and the other members of his family. He should provide them with food and other necessities. Thus he removes the obstacles to his practice of spiritual discipline.

"Those who still have a few worldly experiences to enjoy should lead a householder's life and pray to God. That is why Nityananda allowed the worldly to enjoy catfish soup and the warm embrace of a young woman while repeating God's name.

"But it is quite different with genuine sannyasis. A bee lights on flowers and on nothing else. To the chatak all water except rain is tasteless. It will drink no other water, but looks up agape for the rain that falls when the star Svati is in the ascendant. It drinks only that water. A real sannyasi will not enjoy any kind of bliss except the Bliss of God. The bee lights only on flowers. The real monk is like a bee, whereas the householder devotee is like a common fly, which lights on a festering sore as well as on a sweetmeat.

" You have taken so much trouble to come here. You must be seeking God. But almost everyone is satisfied simply by seeing the garden. Only one or two look for its owner. People enjoy the beauty of the world ; they do not seek its Owner.

(Pointing to the singer) " A little while ago he sang a song describing the six centres. These are dealt with in Yoga. There are two kinds of yoga : hatha-yoga and rajayoga. The hathayogi practises physical exercises. His goal is to acquire supernatural powers : longevity and the eight psychic powers. These are his aims. But the aim of rajayoga is the attainment of devotion, ecstatic love, knowledge, and renunciation. Of these two, rajayoga is the better.

" There is much similarity between the seven ' planes ' described in the Vedanta and the six ' centres ' of Yoga. The first three planes of the Vedas may be compared to the first three Yogic centres, namely, Muladhara, Svadhisthana, and Manipura. With ordinary people the mind dwells in these three planes, at the organs of evacuation and generation and at the navel. When the mind ascends to the fourth plane, the centre designated in Yoga as Anahata, it sees the individual soul as a flame. Besides, it sees light. At this the aspirant cries : ' Ah ! What is this ? Ah ! What is this ? '

" When the mind rises to the fifth plane, the aspirant wants to hear only about God. This is the Visuddha centre of Yoga. The sixth plane and the centre known by the yogi as Ajna are one and the same. When the mind rises there, the aspirant sees God. But still there is a barrier between God and the devotee. It is like the barrier of glass in a lantern, which keeps one from touching the light. King Janaka used to give instruction about Brahmajnana from the fifth plane. Sometimes he dwelt on the fifth plane, and sometimes on the sixth.

" After passing the six centres the aspirant arrives at the seventh plane. Reaching it, the mind merges in Brahman. The individual soul and the Supreme Soul become one. The aspirant goes into samadhi. His consciousness of the body disappears. He loses the knowledge of the outer world. He does not see the manifold any more. His reasoning comes to a stop.

" Trailinga Swami once said that because a man reasons he is conscious of multiplicity, of variety. Attaining samadhi, one gives up the body in twenty-one days. Spiritual consciousness is not possible without the awakening of the Kundalini.

" A man who has realized God shows certain characteristics. He becomes like a child or a madman or an inert thing or a ghoul. Further, he is firmly convinced that he is the machine and God is its Operator, that God alone is the Doer and all others are His instruments. As some Sikh devotees once said to me, even the leaf moves because of God's will. One should be aware that everything happens by the will of Rama. The weaver said : ' The price of the cloth, by the will of Rama, is one rupee six annas. By the will of Rama the robbery was committed. By the will of Rama the robbers were arrested. By the will of Rama I too was arrested by the police. And at last, by the will of Rama, I was released.' "



It was dusk. Sri Ramakrishna had had no rest since his midday meal. He had talked unceasingly to the devotees about God. At last the visitors took their leave and went home.

Friday, June 15, 1883

It was a holiday on account of the Hindu religious festival Dasahara. Among the devotees who visited Sri Ramakrishna at Dakshineswar that day were Adhar, M., and Rakhal's father. Rakhal's father's father-in-law was also present. All were seated on the floor of the Master's room.

Rakhal's father's father-in-law was a devotee of God. He asked the Master, "Sir, can one realize God while leading the life of a householder?"

MASTER (*with a smile*): "Why not? Live in the world like a mudfish. The mudfish lives in the mud but itself remains unstained. Or live in the world like a loose woman. She attends to her household duties, but her mind is always on her sweetheart. Do your duties in the world, fixing your mind on God. But this is extremely difficult. I said to the members of the Brahmo Samaj: 'Suppose a typhoid patient is kept in a room where there are jars of pickles and pitchers of water. How can you expect the patient to recover? The very thought of spiced pickles brings water to one's mouth.' To a man, woman is like that pickle. The craving for worldly things, which is chronic in man, is like the patient's craving for water. There is no end to this craving. The typhoid patient says, 'I shall drink a whole pitcher of water.' The situation is very difficult. There is so much confusion in the world. If you go this way, you are threatened with a bowel; if you go that way, you are threatened with a broomstick; again, in another direction, you are threatened with a shoe-beating. Besides, one cannot think of God unless one lives in solitude. The goldsmith melts gold to make ornaments. But how can he do his work well if he is disturbed again and again? Suppose you are separating rice from bits of husk. You must do it all by yourself. Every now and then you have to take the rice in your hand to see how clean it is. But how can you do your work well if you are called away again and again?"

A DEVOTEE: "What then is the way, sir?"

MASTER: "There is a way. One succeeds if one develops a strong spirit of renunciation. Give up at once, with determination, what you know to be unreal. Once, when I was seriously ill, I was taken to the physician Gangaprasad Sen. He said to me: 'I shall give you a medicine, but you mustn't drink any water. You may take pomegranate juice.' Everyone wondered how I could live without water; but I was determined not to drink it. I said to myself: 'I am a paramahamsa and not a goose.¹⁰ I shall drink only milk.'¹¹

"You have to spend a few days in solitude. If you but touch the 'granny'¹¹ you are safe. Turn yourself into gold and then live wherever you

¹⁰ A paramahamsa is one belonging to the highest order of monks; the word also means "swan". There is a popular tradition in India that a swan can separate the milk from a mixture of milk and water. It is said that a secretion of acid turns the milk into curd, which the swan eats, leaving the water.

¹¹ An allusion to the game of hide-and-seek. See foot-note 6, p. 60.

please. After realizing God and divine love in solitude, one may live in the world as well. (*To Rakhal's father*) That is why I ask the youngsters to stay with me; for they will develop love of God by staying here a few days. After that they can very well lead the life of a householder."

DEVOTEE : "If God is responsible for everything, then why should people speak of good and evil, virtue and vice? One commits sin also by the will of God, isn't that so?"

ANOTHER DEVOTEE : "How can we understand the will of God?"

MASTER : "There is no doubt that virtue and vice exist in the world; but God Himself is unattached to them. There may be good and bad smells in the air, but the air is not attached to them. The very nature of Gods' creation is that good and evil, righteousness and unrighteousness, will always exist in the world. Among the trees in the garden one finds mango and jack-fruit, and hog plum too. Haven't you noticed that even wicked men are needed? Suppose there are rough tenants on an estate; then the landlord must send a ruffian to control them."

The conversation again turned to the life of the householder.

MASTER (*to the Devotees*) : "You see, by leading a householder's life a man needlessly dissipates his mental powers. The loss he thus incurs can be made up if he takes to monastic life. The first birth is a gift of the father; then comes the second birth, when one is invested with the sacred thread. There is still another birth at the time of being initiated into monastic life. The two obstacles to spiritual life are 'woman' and 'gold'. Attachment to 'woman' diverts one from the way leading to God. Man doesn't know what it is that causes his downfall. Once, while going to the Fort,¹² I couldn't see at all that I was driving down a sloping road; but when the carriage went inside the Fort, I realized how far down I had come. Alas! Women keep men deluded. Captain says, 'My wife is full of wisdom.' The man possessed by a ghost does not realize it. He says, 'Why, I am all right!'"

The devotees listened to these words in deep silence.

MASTER : "It is not lust alone that one should be afraid of in the life of the world. There is also anger. Anger arises when obstacles are placed in the way of desire."

M : "At meal-time, sometimes a cat stretches out its paw to take the fish from my plate. But I cannot show any resentment."

MASTER : "Why? You may even beat it once in a while. What's the harm? A worldly man should hiss, but he shouldn't pour out his venom. He mustn't actually injure others. But he should make a show of anger to protect himself from enemies. Otherwise they will injure him. But a sannyasi need not even hiss."

A DEVOTEE : "I find it is extremely difficult for a householder to realize God. How few people can lead the life you prescribe for them! I haven't found any."

MASTER : "Why should that be so? I have heard of a deputy magistrate named Pratap Singh. He is a great man. He has many virtues: compassion

¹² A reference to the fort in Calcutta.

and devotion to God. He meditates on God. Once he sent for me. Certainly there are people like him.

"The practice of discipline is absolutely necessary. Why shouldn't a man succeed if he practises sadhana? But he doesn't have to work hard if he has real faith in his guru's words. Once Vyasa was about to cross the Jamuna, when the gopis also arrived there, wishing to go to the other side. But no ferry-boat was in sight. They said to Vyasa, 'Revered sir, what shall we do now?' 'Don't worry', said Vyasa. 'I will take you across. But I am very hungry. Have you anything for me to eat?' The gopis had plenty of milk, cream, and butter with them. Vyasa ate it all. Then the gopis asked, 'Well, sir, what about crossing the river?' Vyasa stood on the bank of the Jamuna and said, 'O Jamuna, if I have not eaten anything today, then may your waters part so that we may all walk to the other side.' No sooner did the sage utter these words than the waters of the Jamuna parted. The gopis were speechless with wonder. 'He ate so much just now', they said to themselves, 'and he says, "If I have not eaten anything . . .!"' Vyasa had the firm conviction that it was not himself, but the Narayana who dwelt in his heart, that had partaken of the food.

Sankaracharya was a Brahmajnani, to be sure. But at the beginning he too had the feeling of differentiation. He didn't have absolute faith that everything in the world is Brahman. One day as he was coming out of the Ganges after his bath, he saw an untouchable, a butcher, carrying a load of meat. Inadvertently the butcher touched his body. Sankara shouted angrily, 'Hey there! How dare you touch me?' 'Revered sir,' said the butcher, 'I have not touched you, nor have you touched me. The Pure Self cannot be the body nor the five elements nor the twenty-four cosmic principles.' Then Sankara came to his senses. Once Jadabharata was carrying King Rahugana's palanquin and at the same time giving a discourse on Self-Knowledge. The king got down from the palanquin and said to Jadabharata, 'Who are you, pray?' The latter answered, 'I am Not this, not this—I am the Pure Self.' He had perfect faith that he was the Pure Self.

"'I am He', 'I am the Pure Self'—that is the conclusion of the jnanis. But the bhaktas say, 'The whole universe is the glory of God.' Who would recognize a wealthy man without his power and riches? But it is quite different when God Himself, gratified by the aspirant's devotion, says to him, 'You are the same as Myself.' Suppose a king is seated in his court, and his cook enters the hall, sits on the throne, and says, 'O king, you and I are the same!' People will certainly call him a madman. But suppose one day the king, pleased with the cook's service, says to him: 'Come, sit beside me. There is nothing wrong in that. There is no difference between you and me.' Then, if the cook sits on the throne with the king, there is no harm in it. It is not good for ordinary people to say, 'I am He'. The waves belong to the water. Does the water belong to the waves?

"The upshot of the whole thing is that, no matter what path you follow, yoga is impossible unless the mind becomes quiet. The mind of a yogi is under his control; he is not under the control of his mind. When the mind is quiet

the prana stops functioning. Then one gets kumbhaka. One may have the same kumbhaka through bhaktiyoga as well : the prana stops functioning through love of God too. In the kirtan the musician sings, 'Nitai amar mata hati !'¹³ Repeating this, he goes into a spiritual mood and cannot sing the whole sentence. He simply sings, 'Hati ! Hati !' When the mood deepens he sings only, 'Ha ! Ha !' Thus his prana stops through ecstasy, and kumbhaka follows.

" Suppose a man is sweeping a courtyard with his broom, and another man comes and says to him : 'Hello ! So-and-so is no more. He is dead.' Now, if the dead person was not related to the sweeper, the latter goes on with his work, remarking casually : 'Ah ! That's too bad. He is dead. He was a good fellow.' The sweeping goes on all the same. But if the dead man was his relative, then the broom drops from his hand. 'Ah !' he exclaims, and he too drops to the ground. His prana has stopped functioning. He can neither work nor think. Haven't you noticed, among women, that if one of them looks at something or listens to something in speechless amazement, the other women say to her, 'What ? Are you in ecstasy ?' In this instance, too, the prana has stopped functioning, and so she remains speechless, with mouth agape.

" It will not do merely to repeat, 'I am He, I am He.' There are certain signs of a jnani. Narendra has big protruding eyes. (*Pointing to a devotee*) He also has good eyes and forehead.

" All men are by no means on the same level. It is said that there are four classes of men : the bound, the struggling, the liberated, and the ever-free. It is also not a fact that all men have to practise spiritual discipline. There are the ever-free and those who achieve perfection through spiritual discipline. Some realize God after much spiritual austerity, and some are perfect from their very birth. Prahlada is an example of the ever-free.

" Eternally perfect sages like Prahlada also practise meditation and prayer. But they have realized the fruit, God-vision, even before their spiritual practice. They are like gourds and pumpkins, which grow fruit first and then flowers.

(*Looking at Rakhal's father*) " Even though an eternally perfect soul is born in a low family, still he retains his innate perfection. He cannot do anything else. A pea germinating in a heap of cow-dung still grows into a pea-plant.

" God has given to some greater power than to others. In one man you see it as the light of a lamp, in another, as the light of a torch. One word of Vidyasagar's revealed to me the utmost limit of his intelligence. When I told him of the different manifestations of God's Power in different beings, he said to me, 'Sir, has God then given greater power to some than to others ?' At once I said : 'Yes, certainly He has. If there are not different degrees of manifestation of His Power, then why should your name be known far and wide ? You see, we have come to you after hearing of your knowledge and

¹³ " My Nitai dances like a mad elephant ! "

compassion. You haven't grown two horns, have you ?' With all his fame and erudition, Vidyasagar said such a childish thing as 'Has God given greater power to some than to others ?' The truth is that when the fisherman draws his net, he first catches big fish like trout and carp ; then he stirs up the mud with his feet, and small fish come out—minnows, mud-fish; and so on. So also, unless a man knows God, 'minnows' and the like gradually come out from within him. What can one achieve through mere scholarship ?"

Sunday, June 17, 1883

Sri Ramakrishna was resting in his room in the temple garden at Dakshineswar. It was afternoon. Adhar and M. arrived and saluted the Master. A Tantrik devotee also came in. Rakhal, Hazra, and Ramlal were staying with Sri Ramakrishna.

MASTER (*to the devotees*) : 'Why shouldn't one be able to attain spirituality, living the life of a householder ? But it is extremely difficult. Sages like Janaka entered the world after attaining Knowledge. But still the world is a place of terror. Even a detached householder has to be careful. Once Janaka bent down his head at the sight of a bhairavi. He shrank from seeing a woman. The bhairavi said to him : 'Janaka, I see you have not yet attained Knowledge. You still differentiate between man and woman.'

"If you move about in a room filled with soot, you will soil your body, however slightly, no matter how clever you may be. I have seen householder devotees filled with spiritual emotion while performing their daily worship wearing their silk clothes. They maintain that attitude even until they take their refreshments after the worship. But afterwards they become their old selves again. They display their rajasic and tamasic natures.

"Sattva begets bhakti. Even bhakti has three aspects : sattva, rajas, and tamas. The sattva of bhakti is pure sattva. When a devotee acquires it he doesn't direct his mind to anything but God. He pays only as much attention to his body as is absolutely necessary for its protection.

"But a paramahamsa is beyond the three gunas. Though they exist in him, yet they are practically non-existent. Like a child, he is not under the control of any of the gunas. That is why paramahamsas allow small children to come near them—in order to assume their nature.

"Paramahamsas may not lay things up ; but this rule does not apply to householders. They must provide for their families."

TANTRIK DEVOTEE : "Is a paramahamsa aware of virtue and vice ?"

MASTER : "Keshab Sen also asked that question. I said to him, 'If I explain that to you, then you won't be able to keep your society together.' 'In that case we had better stop here', said Keshab.

"Do you know the significance of virtue and vice ? A paramahamsa sees that it is God who gives us evil tendencies as well as good tendencies. Haven't you noticed that there are both sweet and bitter fruits ? Some trees give sweet fruit, and some bitter or sour. God has made the mango-tree, which yields sweet fruit, and also the hog plum, which yields sour fruit."

TANTRIK : "Yes, sir. That is true. On the hill-top one sees extensive rose gardens, reaching as far as the eye can see."

MASTER : "The paramahansa realizes that all these—good and bad, virtue and vice, real and unreal—are only the glories of God's maya. But these are very deep thoughts. One realizing this cannot keep an organization together or anything like that."

TANTRIK : "But the law of karma exists, doesn't it ? "

MASTER : "That also is true. Good produces good, and bad produces bad. Don't you get the hot taste if you eat chillies ? But these are all God's lila, His play."

TANTRIK : "Then what is the way for us ? We shall have to reap the result of our past karma, shall we not ? "

MASTER : "That may be so. But it is different with the devotees of God. Listen to a song :

O mind, you do not know how to farm !
 Fallow lies the field of your life.
 If you had only worked it well,
 How rich a harvest you might reap !
 Hedge it about with Kali's name
 If you would keep your harvest safe ;
 This is the stoutest hedge of all,
 For Death himself cannot come near it.

Sooner or later will dawn the day
 When you must forfeit your precious field ;
 Gather, O mind, what fruit you may.
 Sow for your seed the holy name
 Of God that your guru has given to you,
 Faithfully watering it with love ;
 And if you should find the task too hard,
 Call upon Ramprasad for help."

He sang again :

I have securely blocked the way by which the King of Death
 will come ;
 Henceforward all my doubts and fears are set at naught for ever,
 Siva Himself is standing guard at the nine doorways of my house,¹⁴
 Which has one Pillar¹⁵ for support, and three ropes¹⁶ to secure it.
 The Lord has made His dwelling-place the thousand-petalled
 lotus flower
 Within the head, and comforts me with never-ceasing care.

The Master continued : "Anyone who dies in Benares, whether a brahmin or a prostitute, will become Siva. When a man sheds tears at the name of Hari, Kali, or Rama, then he has no further need of the sandhya and other rites. All actions drop away of themselves. The fruit of action does not touch him."

¹⁴ The body with its nine apertures, such as eyes, ears, nose, mouth, etc.

¹⁵ Brahman.

¹⁶ The three gunas.

*Again the Master sang :

As is a man's meditation, so is his feeling of love : .
 As is a man's feeling of love, so is his gain ;
 And faith is the root of all.
 If in the Nectar Lake of Mother Kali's feet
 My mind remains immersed,
 Of little use are worship, oblations, or sacrifice.

He sang another song :

Why should I go to Ganga or Gaya, to Kasi, Kanchi, or Prabhas,
 So long as I can breathe my last with Kali's name upon my
 lips ? . . .

Then he said, "When a man merges himself in God, he can no longer retain wicked or sinful tendencies."

TANTRIK : "You have said rightly that he keeps only the 'Knowledge ego'."

MASTER : "Yes, he keeps only the 'Knowledge ego,' the 'devotee ego', the 'servant ego', and the 'good ego'. His 'wicked ego' disappears."

TANTRIK : "Today you have destroyed many of our doubts."

MASTER : "All doubts disappear when one realizes the Self."

"Assume the tamasic aspect of bhakti. Say with force : 'What? I have uttered the names of Rama and Kali. How can I be in bondage any more? How can I be affected by the law of karma?'"

The Master sang :

If only I can pass away repeating Durga's name,
 How canst Thou then, O Blessed One,
 Withhold from me deliverance,
 Wretched though I may be?
 I may have stolen a drink of wine, or killed a child unborn,
 Or slain a woman or a cow,
 Or even caused a brahmin's death :
 But, though it all be true,
 Nothing of this can make me feel the least uneasiness :
 For through the power of Thy sweet name
 My wretched soul may still aspire
 Even to Brahmanhood.

The Master continued : "Faith! Faith! Faith! Once a guru said to his pupil, 'Rama alone has become everything.' When a dog began to eat the pupil's bread, he said to it : 'O Rama, wait a little. I shall butter Your bread.' Such was his faith in the words of his guru.

"Worthless people do not have any faith. They always doubt. But doubts do not disappear completely till one realizes the Self.

"In genuine love of God there is no desire. Only through such love does one speedily realize God. Attainment of supernatural powers and so on—these are desires. Krishna once said to Arjuna : 'Friend, you cannot realize God if you acquire even one of the eight supernatural powers. They will only add a little to your power.'"

TANTRIK : "Sir, why don't the rituals of Tantra bear fruit nowadays ? "

MASTER : "It is because people cannot practise them with absolute correctness and devotion."

In conclusion the Master said : "Love of God is the one essential thing. A true lover of God has nothing to fear, nothing to worry about. He is aware that the Divine Mother knows everything. The cat handles the mouse one way, but its own kitten a very different way."

XII

THE FESTIVAL AT PANIHATI

Monday, June 18, 1883

SRI RAMAKRISHNA had been invited to the great religious festival at Panihati, near Calcutta. This "Festival of the Flattened Rice" was inaugurated by Raghunath Das, a disciple of Sri Chaitanya. It is said that Raghunath used to run away from home, secretly practise his devotions, and enjoy the bliss of spiritual ecstasy. One day Nityananda said to him : " Thief ! You run away from home and enjoy the love of God all alone. You hide it from us. I shall punish you today. You must arrange a religious festival and entertain the devotees with flattened rice." Since then the festival has been annually celebrated at Panihati by the Vaishnavas. Thousands of the followers of Sri Chaitanya participate in it. Its chief feature is the singing of the names and glories of God, and the dancing of the devotees in religious fervour. The centre of the festivity is the temple of Radha-Krishna, built on the bank of the Ganges.

The Master had been invited to the festival by Mani Sen, who was the custodian of the temple. Ram, M., Rakhal, Bhavanath, and a few other disciples went with the Master in a carriage. On his way to Panihati Sri Ramakrishna was in a light mood and joked with the youngsters. But as soon as the carriage reached the place of the festival, the Master, to the utter amazement of the devotees, shot into the crowd. He joined the kirtan party of Navadvip Goswami, Mani Sen's guru, and danced, totally forgetting the world. Every now and then he stood still in samadhi, carefully supported by Navadvip Goswami for fear he might fall to the ground. Thousands of devotees were gathered together for the festival. Wherever one looked there was a forest of human heads. The crowd seemed to become infected by the Master's divine fervour and swayed to and fro, chanting the name of God, until the very air seemed to reverberate with it. Drums, cymbals, and other instruments produced melodious sounds. The atmosphere became intense with spiritual fervour. The devotees felt that Gauranga himself was being manifested in the person of Sri Ramakrishna. Flowers were showered from all sides on his feet and head. The shouting of the name of Hari was heard even at a distance, like the rumbling of the ocean.

Sri Ramakrishna entered by turn into all the moods of ecstasy. In deep samadhi he stood still, his face radiating a divine glow. In the state of partial

consciousness he danced, sometimes gently and sometimes with the vigour of a lion. Again, regaining consciousness of the world, he sang, himself leading the chorus :

Behold, the two brothers¹ have come, who weep while chanting
Hari's name,
The brothers who dance in ecstasy and make the world dance in
His name !
Behold them, weeping themselves, and making the whole world
weep as well,
The brothers who, in return for blows, offer to sinners Hari's love.
Behold them, drunk with Hari's love, who make the world drunk
as well !
Behold, the two brothers have come, who once were Kanai and
Balai of Braja,
They who would steal the butter out of the pots of the gopi maid-servants.
Behold, the two have come, who shatter all the rules of caste,
Embracing everyone as brother, even the outcaste shunned by men ;
Who lose themselves in Hari's name, making the whole world mad ;
Who are none other than Hari Himself, and chant His hallowed
name !
Behold them, who saved from their sinful ways the ruffians Jagai
and Madhai,²
They who cannot distinguish between a friend and an enemy !
Behold the two brothers, Gaur and Nitai, who come again to save
mankind.

Again the Master sang :

See how all Nadia is shaking
Under the waves of Gauranga's love ! . . .

The crowd, with the Master in the centre, surged toward the temple of Radha-Krishna. Only a small number could enter. The rest stood outside the portal and jostled with one another to have a look at Sri Ramakrishna. In a mood of intoxication he began to dance in the courtyard of the shrine. Every now and then his body stood transfigured in deep samadhi. Hundreds of people around him shouted the name of God, and thousands outside caught the strain and raised the cry with full-throated voices. The echo travelled over the Ganges, striking a note in the hearts of people in the boats on the holy river, and they too chanted the name of God.

When the kirtan was over, Mani Sen took Sri Ramakrishna and Navadvip Goswami into a room and served them with refreshments. Afterwards Ram, M., and the other devotees were also served with the prasad.

In the afternoon, the Master was sitting in Mani Sen's drawing-room with the devotees. Navadvip was also near him. Mani offered the carriage hire to Sri Ramakrishna. Pointing to Ram and the others, the Master said : "Why should they accept it from you ? They earn money." He became engaged in conversation with Navadvip.

¹ Gauranga and Nityananda.

² At one time Nityananda was beaten by the ruffians Jagai and Madhai, who later were converted to spiritual life by his love.

•MASTER : "Bhakti matured becomes bhava. Next is mahabhava, then prema, and last of all is the attainment of God. Gauranga experienced the states of mahabhava and prema. When prema is awakened, a devotee completely forgets the world; he also forgets his body, which is so dear to a man. Gauranga experienced prema. He jumped into the ocean, thinking it to be the Jamuna. The ordinary jiva does not experience mahabhava or prema. He goes only as far as bhava. But Gauranga experienced all three states. Isn't that so ? "

NAVADVIP : "Yes, sir, that is true. The inmost state, the semi-conscious state, and the conscious state."

MASTER : "In the inmost state he would remain in samadhi, unconscious of the outer world. In the semi-conscious state he could only dance. In the conscious state he chanted the name of God."

Navadvip introduced his son to the Master. The young man was a student of the scriptures. He saluted Sri Ramakrishna.

NAVADVIP : "He studies the scriptures at home. Previously one hardly saw a copy of the Vedas in this country. Max Muller has translated them; so people can now read these books."

MASTER : "Too much study of the scriptures does more harm than good. The important thing is to know the essence of the scriptures. After that, what is the need of books? One should learn the essence and then dive deep in order to realize God."

"The Divine Mother has revealed to me the essence of the Vedanta. It is that Brahman alone is real and the world illusory. The essence of the *Gita* is what you get by repeating the word ten times. The word becomes reversed. It is then 'tagi', which refers to renunciation. The essence of the *Gita* is: 'O man, renounce everything and practise spiritual discipline for the realization of God.'"

NAVADVIP : "But how can we persuade our minds to renounce?"

MASTER : "You are a goswami. It is your duty to officiate as priest in the temple. You cannot renounce the world; otherwise, who would look after the temple and its services? You have to renounce mentally."

"It is God Himself who has kept you in the world to set an example to men. You may resolve in your mind a thousand times to renounce the world, but you will not succeed. God has given you such a nature that you must perform your worldly duties."

"Krishna said to Arjuna: 'What do you mean, you will not fight? By your mere will you cannot desist from fighting. Your very nature will make you fight.'"

At the mere mention of Krishna and Arjuna the Master went into samadhi.* In the twinkling of an eye his body became motionless and his eyeballs transfixed, while his breathing could scarcely be noticed. At this sudden transformation Navadvip and his son and the other devotees looked at the Master in mute wonder.

Regaining partial consciousness, he said to Navadvip: "Yoga and bhoga. You goswamis have both. Now your only duty is to call on God and pray to

Him sincerely : (O God, I don't want the glories of Thy world-bewitching maya. I want Thee alone !) God dwells in all beings, undoubtedly. That being the case, who may be called His devotee ? He who dwells in God, he who has merged his mind and life and innermost soul in God."

The Master returned to the sense plane. Referring to his samadhi, he said to Navadvip : " Some say that this state of mine is a disease. I say to them, ' How can one become unconscious by thinking of Him whose Consciousness has made the whole world conscious ? ' "

Mani Sen said good-bye to the invited brahmins and Vaishnavas with suitable gifts of money. He offered five rupees to Sri Ramakrishna. The latter said that he could not possibly accept any money. But Mani insisted. The Master then asked him in the name of his guru not to press him. Mani requested him again to accept the offering. Sri Ramakrishna asked M., in a distressed voice, whether he should take the money. The disciple made a vehement protest and said, " No, sir. By no means."

Friends of Mani Sen gave the money to Rakhal, requesting him to buy some mangoes and sweets for the Master. Sri Ramakrishna said to M. : " I have definitely said to Mani that I would not accept the money. I feel free now. But Rakhal has accepted it. His is now the responsibility."

Sri Ramakrishna, accompanied by the devotees, took a carriage to return to Dakshineswar. They were going to pass the temple garden of Mati Seal on the way. For a long time the Master had been asking M. to take him to the reservoir in the garden in order that he might teach him how to meditate on the formless God. There were tame fish in the reservoir. Nobody harmed them. Visitors threw puffed rice and other bits of food into the water, and the big fish came in swarms to eat the food. Fearlessly the fish swam in the water and sported there joyously.

Coming to the reservoir, the Master said to M. : " Look at the fish. Meditating on the formless God is like swimming joyfully like these fish, in the Ocean of Bliss and Consciousness."

Monday, June 25, 1883

Sri Ramakrishna was at Balaram Bose's house in Calcutta. Rakhal and M. were seated near him. The Master was in ecstasy. He conversed with the devotees in an abstracted mood.

MASTER : " Let me assure you that a man can realize his Inner Self through sincere prayer. But to the extent that he has the desire to enjoy worldly objects, his vision of the Self becomes obstructed."

M : " Yes, sir. You always ask us to plunge into God."

MASTER (joyously) : " Yes ! That's it. Let me tell you that the realization of Self is possible for all, without any exception."

M : " That is true, sir. But God is the Doer. He works through different beings in different ways, according to their capacity to manifest the Divine. God gives to some full spiritual consciousness, and others He keeps in ignorance."

MASTER : " No, that is not so. One should pray to God with a longing heart. God certainly listens to prayer if it is sincere. There is no doubt about it."

*A DEVOTEE : "Yes, sir. There is this 'I-consciousness' in us ; therefore we must pray."

MASTER (*to M.*) : "A man should reach the Nitya, the Absolute, by following the trail of the Lila, the Relative. It is like reaching the roof by the stairs. After realizing the Absolute, he should climb down to the Relative and live on that plane in the company of devotees, charging his mind with the love of God. This is my final and most mature opinion."

"God has different forms, and He sports in different ways. He sports as Ivara, deva, man, and the universe. In every age He descends to earth in human form, as an Incarnation, to each people love and devotion. There is the instance of Chaitanya. One can taste devotion and love of God only through His Incarnations. Infinite are the ways of God's play, but what I need is love and devotion. I want only the milk. The milk comes through the udder of the cow. The Incarnation is the udder."

Was Sri Ramakrishna hinting that he was an Incarnation of God ? Did he suggest that those who saw him saw God ? Did he thus speak about himself when speaking of Chaitanya ?

It was a hot day in June 1883. Sri Ramakrishna was sitting on the steps of the Siva temples in the temple garden. M. arrived with ice and other offerings and sat down on the steps after saluting the Master.

MASTER (*to M.*) : "The husband of Mani Mallick's granddaughter was here. He read in a book³ that God could not be said to be quite wise and omniscient ; otherwise, why should there be so much misery in the world ? As regards death, it would be much better to kill a man all at once, instead of putting him through slow torture. Further, the author writes that if he himself were the Creator, he would have created a better world."

M. listened to these words in surprise and made no comment.

MASTER (*to M.*) : "Can a man ever understand God's ways ? I too think of God sometimes as good and sometimes as bad. He has kept us deluded by His great illusion. Sometimes He wakes us up and sometimes He keeps us unconscious. One moment the ignorance disappears, and the next moment it covers our mind. If you throw a brickbat into a pond covered with moss, you get a glimpse of the water. But a few moments later the moss comes dancing back and covers the water.

"One is aware of pleasure and pain, birth and death, disease and grief, as long as one is identified with the body. All these belong to the body alone, and not to the Soul. After the death of the body, perhaps God carries one to a better place. It is like the birth of the child after the pain of delivery ! Attaining Self-Knowledge, one looks on pleasure and pain, birth and death, as a dream.

"How little we know ! Can a one-seer pot hold ten seers of milk ? If ever a salt doll ventures into the ocean to measure its depth, it cannot come back and give us the information. It melts into the water and disappears."

At dusk the evening service began in the different temples. The Master was sitting on the small couch in his room, absorbed in contemplation of the

³ The autobiography of John Stuart Mill.

Divine Mother. Several devotees also were there. M. was going to spend the night with the Master.

A little later Sri Ramakrishna began to talk to a devotee privately, on the verandah north of his room. He said : "It is good to meditate in the small hours of the morning and at dawn. One should also meditate daily after dusk." He instructed the devotee about meditation on the Personal God and on the Impersonal Reality.

After a time he sat on the semicircular porch west of his room. It was about nine o'clock.

MASTER : "Those who come here will certainly have all their doubts removed. What do you say ?"

M : "That is true, sir."

A boat was moving in the Ganges, far away from the bank. The boatman began to sing. The sound of his voice floating over the river reached the Master's ears, and he went into a spiritual mood. The hair on his body stood on end. He said to M., "Just feel my body." M. was greatly amazed. He thought : "The Upanishads describe Brahman as permeating the universe and the ether. Has that Brahman, as sound, touched the Master's body ?"

After a time Sri Ramakrishna began to converse again.

MASTER : "Those who come here must have been born with good tendencies. Isn't that true ?"

M : "It is true, sir."

MASTER : "Adhar must have good tendencies."

M : "That goes without saying."

MASTER : "A guileless man easily realizes God. There are two paths : the path of righteousness and the path of wickedness. One should follow the path of righteousness."

M : "That is true, sir. If a thread has a single fibre sticking out, it cannot pass through the eye of a needle."

MASTER : "If a man finds a hair in the food he is chewing, he spits out the entire morsel."

M : "But you say that the man who has realized God cannot be injured by evil company. A blazing fire burns up even a plantain-tree."

Saturday, July 14, 1883

Sri Ramakrishna arrived at Adhar's house in Calcutta. Rakhal, M., and other devotees were with the Master. Adhar had arranged to have Rajnarayan, the famous singer, and his party, recite the *Chandi*.

Rajnarayan began the recital in the worship hall. He sang :

I have surrendered my soul at the fearless feet of the Mother ;
Am I afraid of Death any more ? . . .

As the Master listened, he became filled with divine fervour and joined the musicians. Now and then he improvised an appropriate line. Suddenly he went into samadhi and stood still.

* The singer sang again :

Who is the Woman yonder who lights the field of battle ?
 Darker Her body gleams even than the darkest storm-cloud,
 And from Her teeth there flash the lightning's blinding flames !
 Dishevelled Her hair is flying behind as She rushes about,
 Undaunted in this war between the gods and the demons.
 Laughing Her terrible laugh, She slays the fleeing asuras,
 And with Her dazzling flashes She bares the horror of war.

How beautiful on Her brow the drops of moisture appear !
 About Her dense black hair the bees are buzzing in swarms ;
 The moon has veiled its face, beholding this Sea of Beauty.
 Tell me, who can She be, this Sorceress ? Wonder of wonders !
 Siva Himself, like a corpse, lies vanquished at Her feet.
 Kamalakanta has guessed who She is, with the elephant's gait :
 She is none other than Kali, Mother of all the worlds.

Sri Ramakrishna was in deep samadhi.

Saturday, July 21, 1883

It was about four o'clock in the afternoon when Sri Ramakrishna, with Ramlal and one or two other devotees, started from Dakshineswar for Calcutta in a carriage. As the carriage passed the gate of the Kali temple, they met M. coming on foot with four mangoes in his hand. The carriage stopped and M. saluted the Master. Sri Ramakrishna was going to visit some of his devotees in Calcutta.

MASTER (*to M., with a smile*) : "Come with us. We are going to Adhar's house."

M. got joyfully into the carriage. Having received an English education, he did not believe in the tendencies inherited from previous births. But he had admitted a few days before that it was on account of Adhar's good tendencies from past births that he showed such great devotion to the Master. Later on he had thought about this subject and had discovered that he was not yet completely convinced about inherited tendencies. He had come to Dakshineswar that day to discuss the matter with Sri Ramakrishna. *

MASTER : "Well, what do you think of Adhar ?"

M. : "He has great yearning for God."

MASTER : "Adhar, too, speaks very highly of you."

M. remained silent awhile and then began to speak of past tendencies.

M. : "I haven't much faith in rebirth and inherited tendencies. Will that in any way injure my devotion to God ?"

MASTER : "It is enough to believe that all is possible in God's creation. Never allow the thought to cross your mind that your ideas are the only true ones, and that those of others are false. Then God will explain everything.

"What can a man understand of God's activities ? The facets of God's creation are infinite. I do not try to understand God's actions at all. I have heard that everything is possible in God's creation, and I always bear that in mind. Therefore I do not give a thought to the world, but meditate on

God alone. Once Hanuman was asked, 'What day of the lunar month is it?' Hanuman said : 'I don't know anything about the day of the month, the position of the moon and stars, or any such things. I think of Rama alone.'

"Can one ever understand the work of God? He is so near; still it is not possible for us to know Him. Balarama did not realize that Krishna was God."

M. : "That is true, sir."

MASTER : "God has covered all with His maya. He doesn't let us know anything. Maya is 'woman and gold'. He who puts maya aside to see God, can see Him. Once, when I was explaining God's actions to someone, God suddenly showed me the lake at Kamarpukur. I saw a man removing the green scum and drinking the water. The water was clear as crystal. God revealed to me that Satchidananda is covered by the scum of maya. He who puts the green scum aside can drink the water."

"Let me tell you a very secret experience. Once I had entered the wood near the pine-grove, and was sitting there; when I had a vision of something like the hidden door of a chamber. I couldn't see the inside of the chamber. I tried to bore a hole in the door with a nail-knife, but did not succeed. As I bored, the earth fell back into the hole and filled it. Then suddenly I made a very big opening."

Uttering these words, the Master remained silent. After a time he said : "These are very profound words. I feel as if someone were pressing my mouth. . . . I have seen with my own eyes that God dwells even in the sexual organ. I saw Him once in the sexual intercourse of a dog and a bitch."

"The universe is conscious on account of the Consciousness of God. Sometimes I find that this Consciousness wriggles about, as it were, even in small fish."

The carriage came to the crossing at Shovabazar in Calcutta. The Master continued, saying, "Sometimes I find that the universe is saturated with the Consciousness of God, as the earth is soaked with water in the rainy season.

"Well, I see so many visions, but I never feel vain about them."

M. (with a smile) : "That you should speak of vanity, sir!"

MASTER : "Upon my word, I don't feel vanity even in the slightest degree."

M. : "There once lived a man in Greece, Socrates by name. A voice from heaven said that he was wise among men. Socrates was amazed at this revelation. He meditated on it a long time in solitude and then realized its significance. He said to his friends 'I alone of all people have understood that I do not know anything.' But every man believes he is wise. In reality all are ignorant."

MASTER : "Now and then I think, 'What is it I know that makes so many people come to me?' Vaishnavcharan was a great pundit. He used to say to me : 'I can find in the scriptures all the things you talk about. But do you know why I come to you? I come to hear them from your mouth!'"

M. : "All your words tally with the scriptures. Navadvip Goswami also said that the other day at the festival at Panihati. You told us that day

that by repeating the word 'Gita' a number of times one reverses it and it becomes 'tagi', which refers to renunciation. Renunciation is the essence of the Gita. Navadvip Goswami supported your statement from the grammatical standpoint."

MASTER : "Have you found anyone else resembling me—any pundit or holy man?"

M : "God has created you with His own hands, whereas He has made others by machine. All others He has created according to law."

MASTER (*laughing, to Ramlal and the other devotees*) : "Listen to what he is saying!"

Sri Ramakrishna laughed for some time, and said at last, "Really and truly I have no pride—no, not even the slightest bit."

M : "Knowledge does us good in one respect at least; it makes us feel that we do not know anything, that we are nothing."

MASTER : "Right you are! I am nothing. I am nobody."

"Do you believe in English astronomy?"

M : "It is possible to make new discoveries by applying the laws of Western astronomy. Observing the irregular movement of Uranus, the astronomers looked through their telescopes and discovered Neptune shining in the sky. They can also foretell eclipses."

MASTER : "Yes, that is so."

The carriage drove on. They were approaching Adhar's house. Sri Ramakrishna said to M., "Dwell in the truth and you will certainly realize God."

M : "You said the other day to Navadvip Goswami : 'O God, I want Thee. Please do not delude me with Thy world-bewitching maya. I want to realize Thee!'"

MASTER : "Yes, one should be able to say that from one's innermost soul."

Sri Ramakrishna arrived at Adhar's house and took a seat in the parlour. Ramlal, Adhar, M., and the other devotees sat near him. Rakhal was staying with his father in Calcutta.

MASTER (*to Adhar*) : "Didn't you let Rakhal know that I was coming?"

ADHAR : "Yes, sir. I have sent him word."

Finding that the Master was eager to see Rakhal, Adhar at once sent his carriage to fetch him. Adhar had been yearning to see the Master that day, but he had not definitely known that Sri Ramakrishna was coming.

ADHAR : "You haven't been here for a long time. I prayed to God today that you might come. I even shed tears."

The Master was pleased and said with a smile, "You don't mean that!"

It was dusk and the lamps were lighted. Sri Ramakrishna saluted the Divine Mother with folded hands and sat quietly absorbed in meditation. Then he began to chant the names of God in his sweet voice : "Govinda! Govinda! Satchidananda! Hari! Hari!" Every word he uttered showered nectar on the ears of the devotees.

Ramlal sang in praise of Kali, the Divine Mother :

Thy name, I have heard, O Consort of Siva, is the destroyer of our fear,
And so on Thee I cast my burden : Save me ! Save me, O kindly Mother !
Out of Thy womb the world is born, and Thou it is that dost pervade it.
Art Thou Kali ? Art Thou Radha ? Who can ever rightly say ?

Mother, in every living creature Thou dost have Thy dwelling-place :
As Kundalini Thou dost live in the lotus of the Muladhara.
Above it lies the Svadhisthana, where the four-petalled lotus blooms ;
There also Thou dost make Thy home, O mystic power of Kundalini,
In the four petals of that flower, and in Vajrasana's six petals.
At the navel is Manipura, the blue ten-petalled lotus flower ;
Through the pathway of Sushumna, Thou dost ascend and enter there.

O Lady of the lotuses, in lotus blossoms Thou dost dwell !

Beyond them lies the Lake of Nectar, in the region of the heart,
Where the twelve-petalled lotus flower enchanteth the eye with scarlet flame.

When Thou dost open it, O Mother, touching it with Thy Lotus Feet,
The age-long darkness of the heart instantly scatters at Thy sight.
Above, in the throat, is the sixteen-petalled lotus flower, of smoky hue ;

Within the petals of this flower there lies concealed a subtle space,
Transcending which, one sees at length the universe in Space dissolve.

And higher yet, between the eyebrows, blossoms the lotus of two petals,

Where the mind of man remains a prisoner and past controlling :
From this flower the mind desires to watch the sportive play of life.

Highest of all, within the head, the soul-enthralling centre is,
Where shines the thousand-petalled lotus, Mahadeva's dwelling-place.

Having ascended to His throne, O Spouse of Siva, sit beside Him !
Thou art the Primal Power, O Mother ! She whose senses are controlled :

The yogis meditate on Thee as Uma, great Himalaya's daughter.

Thou who art the Power of Siva ! Put to death my ceaseless cravings :

Grant that I never fall again into the ocean of this world.
Mother, Thou art the Primal Power, Thou the five cosmic principles ;
Who can ever hope to know Thee, who art beyond all principles ?
Only for Thy bhaktas' sake dost Thou assume Thy various forms ;
But when Thy devotee's five senses merge in the five elements,
Mother, it is Thyself alone that he beholds as formless Truth.

As Ramlal sang the lines :

Above, in the throat, is the sixteen-petalled lotus flower, of smoky hue ;

Within the petals of this flower there lies concealed a subtle space,
Transcending which, one sees at length the universe in Space
dissolve.

the Master said to M. : " Listen. This is known as the vision of Satchidananda, the Formless Brahman. The Kundalini, rising above the Visuddha chakra, enables one to see everything as akasa."

M : " Yes, sir."

MASTER : " One attains the Absolute by going beyond the universe and its created beings conjured up by maya. By passing beyond the Nada one goes into samadhi. By repeating ' Om ' one goes beyond the Nada and attains samadhi."

Adhar served Sri Ramakrishna with fruits and sweets. The Master left for Jadu Mallick's house.

Sri Ramakrishna entered the room in Jadu's house where the Divine Mother was worshipped. He stood before the image, which had been decorated with flowers, garlands, and sandal-paste, and which radiated a heavenly beauty and splendour. Lights were burning before the pedestal. A priest was seated before the image. The Master asked one of his companions to offer a rupee in the shrine, according to the Hindu custom.

Sri Ramakrishna stood a long time with folded hands before the blissful image, the devotees standing behind him. Gradually he went into samadhi, his body becoming motionless and his eyes fixed.

With a long sigh he came back to the world of the senses and said, still intoxicated with divine fervour, " Mother, good-bye." But he could not leave the place. He remained standing there. Addressing Ramlal, he said : " Please sing that song. Then I shall be all right."

Ramlal sang :

O Mother, Consort of Siva, Thou hast deluded this world. . . .

The Master went to the drawing-room with the devotees. Every now and then he said, " O Mother, please dwell in my heart ! " Jadu was sitting in the drawing-room with his friends. The Master sat down, still in an ecstatic mood, and sang :

O Mother, ever blissful as Thou art,
Do not deprive Thy worthless child of bliss ! . . .

Finishing the song, he said to Jadu, still in a state of divine fervour : " Well, sir, what shall I sing ? Shall I sing ' Mother, am I Thine eight-months child ' ? "

He sang :

" Mother, am I Thine eight-months child ? ' Thy red eyes cannot
frighten me !

My riches are Thy Lotus Feet, which Siva holds upon His breast ;
Yet, when I seek my heritage, I meet with excuses and delays.
A deed of gift I hold in my heart, attested by Thy Husband Siva :
I shall sue Thee, if I must, and with a single point shall win.

¹ A premature child is generally weak and fearful.

If thou dost oppose me, Thou wilt learn what sort of mother's son I am.

This bitterly contested suit between the Mother and Her son—What sport it is! says Ramprasad. I shall not cease tormenting Thee.

Till Thou Thyself shalt yield the fight and take me in Thine arms at last.

Coming down nearly to a normal state, the Master said, "I shall take some of the Divine Mother's prasad." Then he ate a little of it.

Jadu Mallick was sitting near him with several friends, among whom were a few of his flatterers.

MASTER (with a smile) : "Well, why do you keep these buffoons with you?"

JADU (with a smile) : "Suppose they are. Won't you redeem them?"

MASTER (smiling) : "The water of the Ganges cannot purify a wine-jar."

Jadu had promised the Master that he would arrange a recital of the Chandi in his house. Some time had elapsed, but he had not yet kept his promise.

MASTER : "Well, what about the recital of the Chandi?"

JADU : "I have been busy with many things; I haven't been able to arrange it."

MASTER : "How is that? A man gives his word and doesn't take it back! The words of a man are like the tusks of the elephant: they come out but do not go back. A man must be true to his word. What do you say?"

JADU (with a smile) : "You are right."

MASTER : "You are a shrewd man. You do a thing after much calculation. You are like the brahmin who selects a cow that eats very little, supplies plenty of dung, and gives much milk." (All laugh.)

After a time he said to Jadu : "I now understand your nature. It is half warm and half cold. You are devoted to God and also to the world."

The Master and his devotees were served by Jadu with sweets and fruit, and then the party left for the home of Khelat Ghosh.

Khelat Ghosh's house was a big mansion, but it looked deserted. As the Master entered the house he fell into an ecstatic mood. M., Ramlal, and a few other devotees were with him. Their host was Khelat Ghosh's brother-in-law. He was an old man, a Vaishnava. His body was stamped with the name of God, according to the Vaishnava custom, and he carried in his hand a small bag containing his rosary. He had visited the Master, now and then, at Dakshineswar. But most of the Vaishnavas held narrow religious views: they criticized the Vedantists and the followers of the Siva cult. Sri Ramakrishna soon began to speak.

MASTER : "It is not good to feel that one's own religion alone is true and all others are false. God is one only, and not two. Different people call on Him by different names; some as Allah, some as God, and others as Krishna, Siva, and Brahman. It is like the water in a lake. Some drink it at one place

and call it 'jal', others at another place and call it 'pani', and still others at a third place and call it 'water'. The Hindus call it 'jal', the Christians 'water', and the Mussalmans 'pani'. But it is one and the same thing. Opinions are but paths. Each religion is only a path leading to God, as rivers come from different directions and ultimately become one in the one ocean.

"The Truth established in the Vedas, the Puranas, and the Tantras is but one Satchidananda. In the Vedas It is called Brahman, in the Puranas It is called Krishna, Rama, and so on, and in the Tantras It is called Siva. The one Satchidananda is called Brahman, Krishna, and Siva."

The devotees were silent.

A VAISHNAVA DEVOTEE : "Sir, why should one think of God at all ?"

MASTER : "If a man really has that knowledge,⁵ then he is indeed liberated though living in a body.

"Not all, by any means, believe in God. They simply talk. The worldly-minded have heard from someone that God exists and that everything happens by His will; but it is not their inner belief.

"Do you know what a worldly man's idea of God is like ? It is like the children's swearing by God when they quarrel. They have heard the word while listening to their elderly aunts quarrelling.

"Is it possible for all to comprehend God ? God has created the good and the bad, the devoted and the impious, the faithful and the sceptical. The wonders that we see all exist in His creation. In one place there is more manifestation of His Power, in another less. The sun's light is better reflected by water than by earth, and still better by a mirror. Again, there are different levels among the devotees of God : superior, mediocre, and inferior. All this has been described in the Gita."

VAISHNAVA : "True, sir."

MASTER : "The inferior devotee says, 'God exists, but He is very far off, up there in heaven.' The mediocre devotee says, 'God exists in all beings as life and consciousness.' The superior devotee says : 'It is God Himself who has become everything ; whatever I see is only a form of God. It is He alone who has become maya, the universe, and all living beings. Nothing exists but God.'"

VAISHNAVA : "Does anyone ever attain that state of mind ?"

MASTER : "One cannot attain it unless one has seen God. But there are signs that a man has had the vision of God. A man who has seen God sometimes behaves like a madman : he laughs, weeps, dances, and sings. Sometimes he behaves like a child, a child five years old—guileless, generous, without vanity, unattached to anything, not under the control of any of the gunas, always blissful. Sometimes he behaves like a ghoul : he doesn't differentiate between things pure and things impure ; he sees no difference between things clean and things unclean. And sometimes he is like an inert thing, staring vacantly : he cannot do any work ; he cannot strive for anything."

Was the Master making a veiled reference to his own states of mind ?

⁵ The knowledge that God exists within and without and everywhere. In that case, thinking of God is superfluous.

MASTER (*to the Vaishnava devotee*) : "The feeling of 'Thee and Thine' is the outcome of Knowledge; 'I and mine' comes from ignorance. Knowledge makes one feel: 'O God, Thou art the Doer and I am Thy instrument. O God, to Thee belongs all—body, mind, house, family, living beings, and the universe. All these are Thine. Nothing belongs to me.'

"An ignorant person says, 'Oh, God is there—very far off.' The man of Knowledge knows that God is right here, very near, in the heart; that He has assumed all forms and dwells in all hearts as their Inner Controller." *S - 4*

Sunday, July 22, 1883

12 Taking advantage of the holiday, many householder devotees visited Sri Ramakrishna in his room at the Dakshineswar temple garden. The young devotees, mostly students, generally came on week-days. Sometimes the Master asked his intimate disciples to come on a Tuesday or a Saturday, days that he considered very auspicious for special religious instruction. Adhar, Rakhal, and M. had come from Calcutta in a hired carriage.

Sri Ramakrishna had enjoyed a little rest after his midday meal. The room had an atmosphere of purity and holiness. On the walls hung pictures of gods and goddesses, among them one of Christ rescuing the drowning Peter. Outside the room were plants laden with fragrant flowers, and the Ganges could be seen flowing toward the south. The Master was seated on the small couch, facing the north, and the devotees sat on mats and carpets spread on the floor. All eyes were directed toward him. Mani Mallick, an old Brahmo devotee about sixty-five years of age, came to pay his respects to the Master. He had returned a few months earlier from a pilgrimage to Benares and was recounting his experiences to Sri Ramakrishna.

MANI MALICK : "A monk whom I met in Benares said that no religious experience is possible without the control of the sense-organs. Nothing could be achieved by merely crying 'God ! God !'"

MASTER : "Do you understand the views of teachers like him? According to them, one must first practise spiritual discipline: self-restraint, self-control, forbearance, and the like. Their aim is to attain Nirvana. They are followers of Vedanta. They constantly discriminate, saying, 'Brahman alone is real, and the world illusory.' But this is an extremely difficult path. If the world is illusory, then you too are illusory. The teacher who gives the instruction is equally illusory. His words, too, are as illusory as a dream."

"But this experience is beyond the reach of the ordinary man. Do you know what it is like? If you burn camphor nothing remains. When wood is burnt at least a little ash is left. Finally, after the last analysis, the devotee goes into samadhi. Then he knows nothing whatsoever of 'I', 'you', or the universe."

13 Padmalochan was a man of deep wisdom. He had great respect for me, though at that time I constantly repeated the name of the Divine Mother. He was the court pundit of the Maharaja of Burdwan. Once he came to Calcutta and went to live in a garden house near Kamarhati. I felt a desire to see him and sent Hriday there to learn if the pundit had any vanity. I was told that he had none. Then I met him. Though a man of great knowledge

and scholarship, he began to weep on hearing me sing Ramprasad's devotional songs. We talked together a long while : conversation with nobody else gave me such satisfaction. He said to me, 'Give up the desire for the company of devotees : otherwise people of all sorts will come to you and make you deviate from your spiritual ideal.' Once he entered into a controversy, by correspondence, with Utsavananda, Vaishnavcharan's guru. He told me an interesting incident. Once a meeting was called to decide which of the two deities, Siva or Brahma, was the greater. Unable to come to any decision, the pundits at last referred the matter to Padmalochan. With characteristic guilelessness he said : 'How do I know ? Neither I nor any of my ancestors back to the fourteenth generation have seen Siva or Brahma.' About the renunciation of 'woman and gold', he said to me one day : 'Why have you given up those things ? Such distinctions as "This is money and that is clay," are the outcome of ignorance.' What could I say to that ? I replied : 'I don't know all these things, my dear sir. But for my part, I cannot relish such things as money and the like.'

"There was a pundit who was tremendously vain. He did not believe in the forms of God. But who can understand the inscrutable ways of the Divine ? God revealed Himself to him as the Primal Power. This vision made the pundit unconscious for a long time. After regaining partial consciousness he uttered only the sound 'Ka ! Ka ! Ka !' He could not fully pronounce 'Kali'."

A DEVOTEE : "Sir, you met Pundit Vidyasagar. What did you think of him ?"

MASTER : "Vidyasagar has both scholarship and charity, but he lacks inner vision. Gold lies hidden within him. Had he but found it out, his activities would have been reduced ; finally they would have stopped altogether. Had he but known that God resides in his heart, his mind would have been directed to God in thought and meditation. Some persons must perform selfless work a long time before they can practise dispassion and direct their minds to the spiritual ideal and at last be absorbed in God."

"The activities that Vidyasagar is engaged in are good. Charity is very noble. There is a great deal of difference between daya, compassion, and maya, attachment. Daya is good, but not maya. Maya is love for one's relatives—one's wife, children, brother, sister, nephew, father, and mother. But daya is the same love for all created beings without any distinction."

M : "Is daya also a bondage ?"

MASTER : "Yes, it is. But that concept is something far beyond the ordinary man. Daya springs from sattva. Sattva preserves, rajas creates, and tamas destroys. But Brahman is beyond the three gunas. It is beyond Prakriti."

"None of the three gunas can reach Truth ; they are like robbers, who cannot come to a public place for fear of being arrested. Sattva, rajas, and tamas are like so many robbers."

"Listen to a story. Once a man was going through a forest, when three robbers fell upon him and robbed him of all his possessions. One of the

robbers said, 'What's the use of keeping this man alive?' So saying, he was about to kill him with his sword, when the second robber interrupted him, saying : 'Oh, no! What is the use of killing him? Tie him hand and foot and leave him here.' The robbers bound his hands and feet and went away. After a while the third robber returned and said to the man : 'Ah, I am sorry. Are you hurt? I will release you from your bonds.' After setting the man free, the thief said : 'Come with me. I will take you to the public highway.' After a long time they reached the road. Then the robber said : 'Follow this road. Over there is your house.' At this the man said : 'Sir, you have been very good to me. Come with me to my house.' 'Oh, no!' the robber replied. 'I can't go there. The police will know it.'

"This world itself is the forest. The three robbers prowling here are sattva, rajas, and tamas. It is they that rob a man of the Knowledge of Truth. Tamas wants to destroy him. Rajas binds him to the world. But sattva rescues him from the clutches of rajas and tamas. Under the protection of sattva, man is rescued from anger, passion, and the other evil effects of tamas. Further, sattva loosens the bonds of the world. But sattva also is a robber. It cannot give him the ultimate Knowledge of Truth, though it shows him the road leading to the Supreme Abode of God. Setting him on the path, sattva tells him : 'Look yonder. There is your home.' Even sattva is far away from the Knowledge of Brahman.

"What Brahman is cannot be described. Even he who knows it cannot talk about it. There is a saying that a boat, once reaching the 'black waters' of the ocean, cannot come back.

"Once four friends, in the course of a walk, saw a place enclosed by a wall. The wall was very high. They all became eager to know what was inside. One of them climbed to the top of the wall. What he saw on looking inside made him speechless with wonder. He only cried, 'Ah! Ah!', and dropped in. He could not give any information about what he saw. The others, too, climbed the wall, uttered the same cry, 'Ah! Ah!', and jumped in. Now who could tell what was inside?

"Sages like Jadabharata and Dattatreya, after realizing Brahman, could not describe it. A man's 'I' completely disappears when he goes into samadhi after attaining the Knowledge of Brahman. That is why Ramprasad sang, addressing his mind :

If you should find the task too hard,
Call upon Ramprasad for help.

The mind must completely merge itself in Knowledge. But that is not enough. 'Ramprasad', that is, the principle of 'I', must vanish too. Then alone does one get the Knowledge of Brahman."

A DEVOTEE : "Sir, is it possible then that Sukadeva did not have the ultimate Knowledge?"

MASTER : "According to some people, Sukadeva only saw and touched the Ocean of Brahman; he did not dive into it. That is why he could return to the world and impart religious instruction. According to others, he returned

to the *world of name and form, after attaining the Knowledge of Brahman, for the purpose of teaching others. He had to recite the *Bhagavata*, to King Parikshit and had to teach people in various ways : therefore God did not destroy his 'I' altogether. God kept in him the 'ego of Knowledge'."

DEVOTEE : "Can one keep up an organization after attaining the Knowledge of Brahman ?"

MASTER : "Once I talked to Keshab Sen about the Knowledge of Brahman. He asked me to explain it further. I said, 'If I proceed further, then you won't be able to preserve your organization and following.' 'Then please stop here !' replied Keshab. (*All laugh.*) But still I said to Keshab : 'I' and "mine" indicate ignorance. Without ignorance one cannot have such a feeling as "I am the doer ; these are my wife, children, possessions, name and fame".' Thereupon Keshab said, 'Sir, if one gave up the "I", nothing whatsoever would remain.' I reassured him and said : 'I am not asking you to give up all of the "I". You should give up only the "unripe I". The "unripe I" makes one feel : "I am the doer. These are my wife and children. I am a teacher." Renounce this "unripe I" and keep the "ripe I", which will make you feel that you are the servant of God, His devotee, and that God is the Doer and you are His instrument.'"

DEVOTEE : "Can the 'ripe I' form an organization ?"

MASTER : "I said to Keshab Sen that the 'I' that says, 'I am a leader, I have formed this party, I am teaching people', is the 'unripe I'. It is very difficult to preach religion. It is not possible to do so without receiving the commandment of God. The permission of God is necessary. Sukadeva had a command from God to recite the *Bhagavata*. If, after realizing God, a man gets His command and becomes a preacher or teacher, then that preaching or teaching does no harm. His 'I' is not 'unripe' ; it is 'ripe'."

"I asked Keshab to give up this 'unripe I'. The ego that feels, 'I am the servant of God and lover of God' does not injure one. I said to him : 'You have been constantly talking of your organization and your followers. But people also go away from your organization.' Keshab answered : 'It is true, sir. After staying in it several years, people go to another organization. What is worse, on deserting me they abuse me right and left.' 'Why don't you study their nature ?' I said. 'Is there any good in making anybody and everybody a disciple ?'

"I said to Keshab further : 'You should accept the Divine Mother, the Primal Energy. Brahman is not different from Its Sakti. What is Brahman is also Sakti. As long as a man remains conscious of the body, he is conscious of duality. It is only when a man tries to describe what he sees that he finds duality.' Keshab later on recognized Kali.

"One day when Keshab was here with his disciples, I said to him that I would like to hear him preach. He delivered a lecture in the chandni. Then we all sat by the bathing-ghat and had a long conversation. I said to him : 'It is Bhagavan alone who in one form appears as bhakta, and in another as the *Bhagavata*. Please repeat "Bhagavata—Bhakta—Bhagavan".' Keshab and his disciples repeated the words. Then I asked him to repeat 'Guru—Krishna

—Vaishnava'. Thereupon Keshab said : 'Sir, I should not go so far now. People will say that I have become an orthodox Hindu.'

"It is extremely difficult to go beyond the three gunas. One cannot reach that state without having realized God. Man dwells in the realm of maya. Maya does not permit him to see God. It has made him a victim of ignorance.

"Once Hriday brought a bull-calf here. I saw, one day, that he had tied it with a rope in the garden, so that it might graze there. I asked him, 'Hriday, why do you tie the calf there every day ?' 'Uncle,' he said, 'I am going to send this calf to our village. When it grows strong I shall yoke it to the plough.' As soon as I heard these words I was stunned to think : 'How inscrutable is the play of the divine maya ! Kamarpukur and Sihore¹ are so far away from Calcutta ! This poor calf must go all that way. Then it will grow, and at length it will be yoked to the plough. This is indeed the world ! This is indeed maya !' I fell down unconscious. Only after a long time did I regain consciousness."

It was three or four o'clock in the afternoon. M. found Sri Ramakrishna seated on the couch in an abstracted mood. After some time he heard him talking to the Divine Mother. The Master said, "O Mother, why hast Thou given him only a particle ?" Remaining silent a few moments, he added : "I understand it, Mother. That little bit will be enough for him and will serve Thy purpose. That little bit will enable him to teach people."

Did the Master thus transmit spiritual powers to his disciples ? Did he thus come to know that his disciples, after him, would go out into the world as teachers of men ?

Rakhal was in the room. Sri Ramakrishna was still in a state of partial consciousness when he said to Rakhal : "You were angry with me, weren't you ? Do you know why I made you angry ? There was a reason. Only then would the medicine work. The surgeon first brings an abscess to a head. Only then does he apply a herb so that it may burst and dry up."

After a pause he went on : "Yes, I have found Hazra to be like a piece of dry wood. Then why does he live here ? This has a meaning too. The play is enlivened by the presence of trouble-makers like Jatila and Kutila.

(To M.) "One must accept the forms of God. Do you know the meaning of the image of Jagaddhatri ? She is the Bearer of the Universe. Without Her support and protection the universe would fall from its place and be destroyed. The Divine Mother, Jagaddhatri, reveals Herself in the heart of one who can control the mind, which may be compared to an elephant."

RAKHAL : "The mind is a mad elephant."

MASTER : "Therefore the lion, the carrier of the Divine Mother, keeps it under control."

¹ Hriday's birth-place.

¹ In the image of Jagaddhatri, the lion, Her carrier, is seen keeping an elephant under control.

It was dusk. The evening service began in the temples. Sri Ramakrishna was chanting the names of the gods and goddesses. He was seated on the small couch, with folded hands, and became absorbed in contemplation of the Divine Mother. The world outside was flooded with moonlight, and the devotees inside the Master's room sat in silence and looked at his serene face.

In the mean time Govinda of Belgharia and some of his friends had entered the room. Sri Ramakrishna was still in a semi-conscious state. After a few minutes he said to the devotees : " Tell me your doubts. I shall explain everything."

Govinda and the other devotees looked thoughtful.

GOVINDA : " Revered sir, why does the Divine Mother have a black complexion ? "¹⁰

MASTER : " You see Her as black because you are far away from Her. Go near and you will find Her devoid of all colour. The water of a lake appears black from a distance. Go near and take the water in your hand, and you will see that it has no colour at all. Similarly, the sky looks blue from a distance. But look at the atmosphere near you ; it has no colour. The nearer you come to God, the more you will realize that He has neither name nor form. If you move away from the Divine Mother, you will find Her blue, like the grass-flower. Is Syama male or female ? A man once saw the image of the Divine Mother wearing a sacred thread.¹¹ He said to the worshipper : ' What ? You have put the sacred thread on the Mother's neck ! ' The worshipper said : ' Brother, I see that you have truly known the Mother. But I have not yet been able to find out whether She is male or female ; that is why I have put the sacred thread on Her image.'

" That which is Syama is also Brahman. That which has form, again, is without form. That which has attributes, again, has no attributes. Brahman is Sakti ; Sakti is Brahman. They are not two. These are only two aspects, male and female, of the same Reality, Existence-Knowledge-Bliss Absolute.

GOVINDA : " What is the meaning of ' yogamaya ' ? "

MASTER : " It signifies the yoga, or union, of Purusha¹² and Prakriti.¹³ Whatever you perceive in the universe is the outcome of this union. Take the image of Siva and Kali. Kali stands on the bosom of Siva ; Siva lies under Her feet like a corpse ; Kali looks at Siva. All this denotes the union of Purusha and Prakriti. Purusha is inactive ; therefore Siva lies on the ground like a corpse. Prakriti performs all Her activities in conjunction with Purusha. Thus She creates, preserves, and destroys. That is also the meaning of the conjoined images of Radha and Krishna. On account of that union, again, the images are slightly inclined toward each other.

" To denote this union, Sri Krishna wears a pearl in His nose, Radha a blue stone in hers. Radha has a fair complexion, bright as the pearl. Sri

¹⁰ A reference to the image of Kali.

¹¹ The images of male deities only are invested with the sacred thread.

¹² The male aspect of Reality ; the Soul, or Absolute.

¹³ The female aspect of Reality ; Primordial Nature, or Power.

Krishna's is blue. For this reason Radha wears the blue stone. Further, Krishna's apparel is yellow, and Radha's blue.

"Who is the best devotee of God? It is he who sees, after the realization of Brahman, that God alone has become all living beings, the universe, and the twenty-four cosmic principles. One must discriminate at first, saying 'Not this, not this', and reach the roof. After that one realizes that the steps are made of the same materials as the roof, namely, brick, lime, and brick-dust. The devotee realizes that it is Brahman alone that has become all these—the living beings, the universe, and so on."

"Mere dry reasoning—I spit on it! I have no use for it! (*The Master spits on the ground.*)

"Why should I make myself dry through mere reasoning? May I have unalloyed love for the Lotus Feet of God as long as the consciousness of 'I' and 'you' remains with me!"

(*To Govinda*) "Sometimes I say, 'Thou art verily I, and I am verily Thou.' Again I feel, 'Thou art Thou.' Then I do not find any trace of 'I'. It is Sakti alone that becomes flesh as God Incarnate. According to one school of thought, Rama and Krishna are but two waves in the Ocean of Absolute Bliss and Consciousness."

"Chaitanya, Consciousness, is awakened after Advaita-jnana, the Knowledge of the non-dual Brahman. Then one perceives that God alone exists in all beings as Consciousness. After this realization comes Ananda, Bliss, Advaita, Chaitanya, and Nityananda."

(*To M.*) "Let me ask you not to disbelieve in the forms of God. Have faith in God's forms. Meditate on that form of God which appeals to your mind."

(*To Govinda*) "The fact is that one does not feel the longing to know or see God as long as one wants to enjoy worldly objects. The child forgets everything when he plays with his toys. Try to cajole him away from play with a sweetmeat; you will not succeed. He will eat only a bit of it. When he relishes neither the sweetmeat nor his play, then he says, 'I want to go to my mother.' He doesn't care for the sweetmeat anymore. If a man whom he doesn't know and has never seen says to the child, 'Come along; I shall take you to your mother', the child follows him. The child will go with anyone who will carry him to his mother."

"The soul becomes restless for God when one is through with the enjoyment of worldly things. Then a person has only one thought—how to realize God. He listens to whatever anyone says to him about God."

M. (*to himself*): "Alas! The soul becomes restless for God only when one is through with the enjoyment of worldly things."

August 18, 1883

Sri Ramakrishna was at Balaram Bose's house in Calcutta. He was explaining the mystery of Divine Incarnation to the devotees.

MASTER : "In order to bring people spiritual knowledge, an Incarnation of God lives in the world in the company of devotees, cherishing an attitude of

¹⁵ Non-duality, Consciousness, and Eternal Bliss.

love for God. It is like going up and coming down the stairs after having once reached the roof. In order to reach the roof, other people should follow the path of devotion, as long as they have not attained Knowledge and become free of desire. The roof can be reached only when all desires are done away with. The shopkeeper does not go to bed before finishing his accounts. He goes to sleep only when his accounts are finished.

(To M.) "A man will certainly succeed if he will take the plunge. Success is sure for such a man."

"Well, what do you think of the worship conducted by Keshab, Shivanath, and the other Brahmo leaders ?"

M : "They are satisfied, as you say, with describing the garden, but they seldom speak of seeing the Master of the garden. Describing the garden is the beginning and end of their worship."

MASTER : "You are right. Our only duty is to seek the Master of the garden and speak to Him. The only purpose of life is to realize God."

Sri Ramakrishna then went to Adhar's house. After dusk he sang and danced in Adhar's drawing-room. M., Rakhal, and other devotees were present. After the music he sat down, still in an ecstatic mood. He said to Rakhal : "This religious fervour¹³ is not like rain in the rainy season, which comes in torrents and goes in torrents. It is like an image of Siva that has not been set up by human hands but is a natural one that has sprung up, as it were, from the bowels of the earth. The other day you left Dakshineswar in a temper. I prayed to the Divine Mother to forgive you."

The Master was still in an abstracted mood and said to Adhar, "My son, meditate on the Deity whose name you chanted." With these words he touched Adhar's tongue with his finger and wrote something on it. Did the Master thereby impart spirituality to Adhar ?

¹³ Referring to himself.

XIII

THE MASTER AND M.

August 19, 1883

IT WAS SUNDAY, the first day after the full moon. Sri Ramakrishna was resting after his noon meal. The midday offering had been made in the temples, and the temple doors were closed.

In the early afternoon the Master sat up on the small couch in his room. M. prostrated himself before him and sat on the floor. The Master was talking to him on the philosophy of Vedanta.

MASTER (*to M.*) : "Self-Knowledge is discussed in the *Ashtavakra Samhita*. The non-dualists say, 'Soham', that is, 'I am the Supreme Self.' This is the view of the sannyasis of the Vedantic school. But this is not the right attitude for householders, who are conscious of doing everything themselves. That being so, how can they declare, 'I am That, the actionless Supreme Self'? According to the non-dualists the Self is unattached. Good and bad, virtue and vice, and the other pairs of opposites, cannot in any way injure the Self, though they undoubtedly afflict those who have identified themselves with their bodies. Smoke soils the wall, certainly, but it cannot in any way affect akasa, space. Following Vedantists of this class, Krishnakishore used to say, 'I am Kha', meaning akasa. Being a great devotee, he could say that with some justification ; but it is not becoming for others to do so.

"But to feel that one is a free soul is very good. By constantly repeating, 'I am free, I am free', a man verily becomes free. On the other hand, by constantly repeating, 'I am bound, I am bound', he certainly becomes bound to worldliness. The fool who says only, 'I am a sinner', 'I am a sinner', verily drowns himself in worldliness. One should rather say : 'I have chanted the name of God. How can I be a sinner? How can I be bound?'

(*To M.*) "You see, I am very much depressed today. Hriday has written me that he is very ill. Why should I feel dejected about it? Is it because of maya or daya?"

M. could not find suitable words for a reply, and remained silent.

MASTER : "Do you know what maya is? It is attachment to relatives—parents, brother and sister, wife and children, nephew and niece. Daya means love for all created beings. Now what is this, my feeling about Hriday? Is it maya or daya? But Hriday did so much for me : he served me 1

whole-heartedly and nursed me when I was ill. But later he tormented me also. The torment became so unbearable that once I was about to commit suicide by jumping into the Ganges from the top of the embankment.¹ But he did much to serve me. Now my mind will be at rest if he gets some money. But whom shall I ask for it? Who likes to speak about such things to our rich visitors?"

At two or three o'clock in the afternoon Adhar Sen and Balaram arrived. After saluting Sri Ramakrishna, they sat on the floor and asked him if he was well. The Master said, "Yes, I am well physically, but a little troubled in mind." He did not refer to Hriday and his troubles.

The conversation turned to the Goddess Simhavahini.

MASTER : "Yes, I visited the Goddess. She is worshipped by one of the branches of the Mallick family of Calcutta. This branch of the family is now in straitened circumstances, and the house they live in is dilapidated. The walls and floor are spotted with moss and pigeon-droppings, and the cement and plaster are crumbling. But other branches of the Mallick family are well off. This branch has no signs of prosperity. (To M.) Well, what does that signify?"

M. remained silent.

MASTER : "The thing is that everyone must reap the result of his past karma. One must admit the influence of tendencies inherited from past births and the result of the prarabdha karma. Nevertheless, in that dilapidated house I saw the face of the Goddess radiating a divine light. One must believe in the Divine Presence in the image."

"Once I went to Vishnupur. The raja of that place has several fine temples. In one of them there is an image of the Divine Mother, called Mrinmayi.¹ There are several lakes near the temple, known as the Lalbandh, Krishnabandh, and so on. In the water of one of the lakes I could smell the ointments that women use for their hair. How do you explain that? I didn't know at that time that the woman devotees offer ointments to the Goddess Mrinmayi while visiting Her temple. Near the lake I went into samadhi, though I had not yet seen the image in the temple. In that state I saw the divine form from the waist up, rising from the water."

In the mean time other devotees had arrived. Someone referred to the political revolution and civil war in Kabul. A devotee said that Yakub Khan, the Amir of Afghanistan, had been deposed. He told the Master that the Amir was a great devotee of God.

MASTER : "But you must remember that pleasure and pain are the characteristics of the embodied state. In Kavi Kankan's *Chandi* it is written that Kaluvir was sent to prison and a heavy stone placed on his chest. Yet Kalu was born as a result of a boon from the Divine Mother of the Universe. Thus pleasure and pain are inevitable when the soul accepts a body. Again, take the case of Srikranta, who was a great devotee. Though his mother, Khullana, was very much devoted to the Divine Mother, there was no end to his troubles. He was almost beheaded. There is also the instance of the wood-cutter who

¹ For the legend connected with this temple, see Chap. XLII.

was a great lover of the Divine Mother. She appeared before him and showed him much grace and love; but he had to continue his profession of wood-cutting, and earn his livelihood by that arduous work. Again, while Devaki, Krishna's mother, was in prison, she had a vision of God Himself endowed with four hands, holding mace, discus, conch-shell, and lotus. But with all that she couldn't get out of prison."

M : "Why speak only of getting out of prison? This body is the source of all our troubles. Devaki should have been freed from the body."

MASTER : "The truth is that one must reap the result of the prarabdha karma. The body remains as long as the results of past actions do not completely wear away. Once a blind man bathed in the Ganges and as a result was freed from his sins. But his blindness remained all the same. (All laugh.) It was because of his evil deeds in his past birth that he had to undergo that affliction."

M : "Yes, sir. The arrow that has already left the bow is beyond our control."

MASTER : "However much a bhakta may experience physical joy and sorrow, he always has knowledge and the treasure of divine love. This treasure never leaves him. Take the Pandava brothers for instance. Though they suffered so many calamities, they did not lose their God-Consciousness even once. Where can you find men like them, endowed with so much knowledge and devotion?"

Just then Narendra and Colonel Viswanath Upadhyaya entered the room. Narendra was then twenty-two years old and studying in college. They saluted the Master and sat down. The Master requested Narendra to sing. The tanpura hung on the west wall of the room. The devotees fixed their eyes on Narendra as he began to tune the drums.

MASTER (to Narendra) : "The drums don't sound as well as before."

CAPTAIN : "They are now full. Therefore they are quiet, like a vessel filled with water. Or they are like a holy man, who remains silent when his heart is full of God-Consciousness."

MASTER : "But what about sages like Narada?"

CAPTAIN : "They talked because they were moved by the sufferings of others."

MASTER : "You are right. After attaining samadhi, Narada, Sukadeva, and others came down a few steps, as it were, to the plane of normal consciousness and broke their silence out of compassion for the sufferings of others and to help them."

Narendra began to sing :

Oh, when will dawn for me that day of blessedness
When He who is all Good, all Beauty, and all Truth,
Will light the inmost shrine of my heart?
When shall I sink at last, ever beholding Him,
Into that Ocean of Delight? . . .

No sooner had the Master heard a few words of the song than he went into deep samadhi. He sat with folded hands, facing the east. His body was

erect and his mind completely bereft of worldly consciousness. His breath had almost stopped. With unwinking eyes he sat motionless as a picture on a canvas. His mind had dived deep into the Ocean of God's Beauty.

Narendra left the room and went to the east verandah, where Hazra was seated on a blanket, with a rosary in his hand. They fell to talking. Other devotees arrived. The Master came down from samadhi and looked around. He could not find Narendra. The tanpura was lying on the floor. He noticed that the earnest eyes of the devotees were riveted on him.

MASTER (*referring to Narendra*) : "He has lighted the fire. Now it doesn't matter whether he stays in the room or goes out.

(*To Captain and the other devotees*) "Attribute to yourselves the bliss of God-Consciousness ; then you too will experience ineffable joy. The bliss of God-Consciousness always exists in you. It is only hidden by the veiling and projecting power of maya." The less you are attached to the world, the more you love God."

CAPTAIN : "The farther you proceed toward your home in Calcutta, the farther you leave Benares behind. Again, the farther you proceed toward Benares, the farther behind you leave your home."

MASTER : "As Radha advanced toward Krishna, she could smell more and more of the sweet fragrance of His body. The nearer you approach to God, the more you feel His love. As the river approaches the ocean it increasingly feels the flow of the tides.

"The jnani experiences God-Consciousness within himself ; it is like the upper Ganges, flowing in only one direction. To him the whole universe is illusory, like a dream ; he is always established in the Reality of Self. But with the lover of God the case is different. His feeling does not flow in only one direction. He feels both the ebb-tide and the flood-tide of divine emotion. He laughs and weeps and dances and sings in the ecstasy of God. The lover of God likes to sport with Him. In the Ocean of God-Consciousness he sometimes swims, sometimes goes down, and sometimes rises to the surface—like pieces of ice in the water. (*Laughter.*)

"The jnani seeks to realize Brahman. But the ideal of the bhakta is the Personal God—a God endowed with omnipotence and with the six treasures. Yet Brahman and Sakti are, in fact, not different. That which is the Blissful Mother is, again, Existence-Knowledge-Bliss Absolute. They are like the gem and its lustre. When one speaks of the lustre of the gem, one thinks of the gem ; and again, when one speaks of the gem, one refers to its lustre. One cannot conceive of the lustre of the gem without thinking of the gem, and one cannot conceive of the gem without thinking of its lustre.

"Existence-Knowledge-Bliss Absolute is one, and one only. But It is associated with different limiting adjuncts on account of the different degrees of Its manifestation. That is why one finds various forms of God. The devotee sings, 'O my Divine Mother, Thou art all these !' Wherever you see actions, like creation, preservation, and dissolution, there is the manifestation of

¹² The veiling power of maya hides the Reality ; the projecting power of maya creates the names and forms of the manifold universe.

Sakti. Water is water whether it is calm or full of waves and bubbles. The Absolute alone is the Primordial Energy, which creates, preserves, and destroys. Thus it is the same 'Captain', whether he remains inactive or performs his worship or pays a visit to the Governor General. Only we designate him by different names at different times."

CAPTAIN : "Yes, sir, that is so."

MASTER : "I said those words to Keshab Sen."

CAPTAIN : "Keshab is not an orthodox Hindu. He adopts manners and customs according to his own whim. He is a well-to-do gentleman and not a holy man."

MASTER (*to the other devotees*) : "Captain forbids me to go to see Keshab."

CAPTAIN : "But, sir, you act as you will. What can I do ?"

MASTER (*sharply*) : "Why shouldn't I go to see Keshab ? You feel at ease when you go to the Governor General's house,¹³ and for money at that. Keshab thinks of God and chants His name. Isn't it you who are always saying that God Himself has become the universe and all its living beings ? Doesn't God dwell in Keshab also ?"

With these words the Master left the room abruptly and went to the north-east verandah. Captain and the other devotees remained, waiting for his return. M. accompanied the Master to the verandah, where Narendra was talking with Hazra. Sri Ramakrishna knew that Hazra always indulged in dry philosophical discussions. Hazra would say : "The world is unreal, like a dream. Worship, food offerings to the Deity, and so forth, are only hallucinations of the mind. The aim of spiritual life is to meditate on one's own real Self." Then he would repeat, "I am He." But, with all that, he had a soft corner in his heart for money, material things, and people's attention.

Sri Ramakrishna smiled and said to Hazra and Narendra, "Hello ! What are you talking about ?"

NARENDRA (*smiling*) : "Oh, we are discussing a great many things. They are rather too deep for others."

MASTER (*with a smile*) : "But Pure Knowledge and Pure Love are one and the same thing. Both lead the aspirants to the same goal. The path of love is much the easier."

Narendra quoted a song :

O Mother, make me mad with Thy love !
What need have I of knowledge or reason ?

Narendra said to M. that he had been reading a book by Hamilton, who wrote : "A learned ignorance is the end of philosophy and the beginning of religion."

MASTER (*to M.*) : "What does that mean ?"

Narendra explained the sentence in Bengali. The Master beamed with joy and said in English, "Thank you ! Thank you !" Everyone laughed at the charming way he said these words. They knew that his English vocabulary consisted of only half a dozen words.

¹³ According to orthodox Hindu custom, an Englishman is a mlechchha, one outside the pale of Hindu society. The touch of a mlechchha pollutes a Hindu.

It was almost dusk when most of the devotees, including Narendra, took leave of the Master. Sri Ramakrishna went out and looked at the Ganges for a few minutes from the west porch. Two priests were bathing in preparation for the evening worship. Young men of the village were strolling in the garden or standing on the concrete embankment, gazing at the murmuring river. Others, perhaps more thoughtful, were walking about in the solitude of the Panchavati.

It became dark. The maid-servant lighted the lamp in Sri Ramakrishna's room and burnt incense. The evening worship began in the twelve temples of Siva and in the shrines of Krishna and Kali.

As it was the first day after the full moon, the moonlight soon flooded the tops of the trees and temples, and touched with silver the numberless waves of the sacred river.

The Master returned to his room. After bowing to the Divine Mother, he clapped his hands and chanted the sweet names of God. A number of holy pictures hung on the walls of the room. Among others, there were pictures of Dhruva, Prahlada, Kali, Radha-Krishna, and the coronation of Rama. The Master bowed low before the pictures and repeated the holy names. Then he repeated the holy words, "Brahma—Atma—Bhagavan; Bhagavata—Bhakta—Bhagavan; Brahma—Sakti, Sakti—Brahma; Veda, Purana, Tantra, Gita, Gayatri." Then he said: "I have taken refuge at Thy feet, O Divine Mother; not I, but Thou. I am the machine and Thou art the Operator", and so on.

While the Master was meditating in this fashion on the Divine Mother, a few devotees, coming in from the garden, gathered in his room. Sri Ramakrishna sat down on the small couch. He said to the devotees: "Narendra, Bhavanath, Rakhal, and devotees like them belong to the group of the nitya-siddhas; they are eternally free. Religious practice on their part is superfluous. Look at Narendra. He doesn't care about anyone. One day he was going with me in Captain's carriage. Captain wanted him to take a good seat, but Narendra didn't even look at him. He is independent even of me. He doesn't tell me all he knows, lest I should praise his scholarship before others. He is free from ignorance and delusion. He has no bonds. He is a great soul. He has many good qualities. He is expert in music, both as a singer and player and is also a versatile scholar. Again, he keeps his passions under control and says that he will never marry. There is a close friendship between Narendra and Bhavanath; they are just like man and woman. Narendra doesn't come here very often. That is good, for I am overwhelmed by his presence."

Monday, August 20, 1883

Sri Ramakrishna was sitting on his bed, inside the mosquito net, meditating. It was about eight o'clock in the evening. M. was sitting on the floor with his friend Hari Babu. Hari, a young man of twenty-eight, had lost his wife about eleven years before and had not married a second time. He was much devoted to his parents, brothers, and sisters.

Hazra was living at Dakshineswar. Rakhal lived with the Master, though now and then he stayed at Adhar's house. Narendra, Bhavanath, Adhar, M., Ram, Manomohan, and other devotees visited the Master almost every week.

Hriday, Sri Ramakrishna's nephew, was ill in his home in the country. The Master was worried about him. One of the devotees had sent him a little money, but the Master did not know it.

When Sri Ramakrishna came out of the mosquito net and sat on the small couch, the devotees saluted him.

MASTER (*to M.*) : "I was meditating inside the net. It occurred to me that meditation, after all, was nothing but the imagining of a form, and so I did not enjoy it. One gets satisfaction if God reveals Himself in a flash. Again, I said to myself, 'Who is it that meditates, and on whom does he meditate?'"

M : "Yes, sir. You said that God Himself has become everything—the universe and all living beings. Even he who meditates is God."

MASTER : "What is more, one cannot meditate unless God wills it. One can meditate when God makes it possible for one to do so. What do you say?"

M : "True, sir. You feel like that because there is no 'I' in you. When there is no ego, one feels like that."

MASTER : "But it is good to have a trace of ego, which makes it possible for a man to feel that he is the servant of God. As long as a man thinks that it is he who is doing his duties, it is very good for him to feel that God is the Master and he God's servant. When one is conscious of doing work, one should establish with God the relationship of servant and Master."

M. was always reflecting on the nature of the Supreme Brahman.

MASTER (*to M.*) : "Like the akasa, Brahman is without any modification. It has become manifold because of Sakti. Again, Brahman is like fire, which itself has no colour. The fire appears white if you throw a white substance into it, red if you throw a red, black if you throw a black. The three gunas—sattva, rajas, and tamas—belong to Sakti alone. Brahman Itself is beyond the three gunas. What Brahman is cannot be described. It is beyond words. That which remains after everything is eliminated by the Vedantic process of 'Not this, not this'; and which is of the nature of Bliss, is Brahman."

"Suppose the husband of a young girl has come to his father-in-law's house and is seated in the drawing-room with other young men of his age. The girl and her friends are looking at them through the window. Her friends do not know her husband and ask her, pointing to one young man, 'Is that your husband?' 'No', she answers, smiling. They point to another young man and ask if he is her husband. Again she answers no. They repeat the question, referring to a third, and she gives the same answer. At last they point to her husband and ask, 'Is he the one?' She says neither yes nor no, but only smiles and keeps quiet. Her friends realize that he is her husband."

"One becomes silent on realizing the true nature of Brahman."
(*To M.*) "Well, why do I talk so much?"

M : " You talk in order to awaken the spiritual consciousness of the devotees. You once said that when an uncooked luchi is dropped into boiling ghee it makes a sizzling noise."

The Master began to talk to M. about Hazra.

MASTER : " Do you know the nature of a good man? He never troubles others. He doesn't harass people. The nature of some people is such that when they go to a feast they want special seats. A man who has true devotion to God never makes a false step, never gives others trouble for nothing."

" It is not good to live in the company of bad people. A man should stay away from them and thus protect himself. (To M.) Isn't that so ? "

M : " Yes, sir. The mind sinks far down in the company of the wicked. But it is quite different with a hero, as you say."

MASTER : " How is that ? "

M : " When a fire is feeble it goes out when even a small stick is thrown into it ; but a blazing fire is not affected even if a plantain-tree is thrown into it. The tree itself is burnt to ashes."

The Master asked M. about his friend Hari Babu.

M : " He has come here to pay you his respects. He lost his wife long ago."

MASTER (*to Hari*) : " What kind of work do you do ? "

M : " Nothing in particular. But at home he takes good care of his parents and his brothers and sisters."

MASTER (*with a smile*) : " How is that ? You are like 'Elder, the pumpkin-cutter'. You are neither a man of the world nor a devotee of God. That is not good. You must have seen the sort of elderly man who lives in a family and is always ready, day or night, to entertain the children. He sits in the parlour and smokes the hubble-bubble. With nothing in particular to do, he leads a lazy life. Now and again he goes to the inner court and cuts a pumpkin : for, since women do not cut pumpkins, they send the children to ask him to come and do it. That is the extent of his usefulness—hence his nickname, 'Elder, the pumpkin-cutter'.

" You must do 'this' as well as 'that'. Do your duties in the world, and also fix your mind on the Lotus Feet of the Lord. Read books of devotion like the *Bhagavata* or the life of Chaitanya when you are alone and have nothing else to do."

It was about ten o'clock. Sri Ramakrishna finished a light supper of farina pudding and one or two luchis. After saluting him, M. and his friend took their leave.

Friday, September 7, 1883

Sri Ramakrishna and M. were talking in the Master's room at half past seven in the evening. No one else was present.

MASTER : " The other day I went to Calcutta. As I drove along the streets in the carriage, I observed that everyone's attention was fixed on low things. Everyone was brooding over his stomach and running after nothing but food. Everyone's mind was turned to 'woman and gold'. I saw only

one or two with their attention fixed on higher things, with their minds turned to God."

M : "The present age has aggravated this stomach-worry. Trying to imitate the English, people have turned their attention to more luxuries ; therefore their wants have also increased."

MASTER : "What do the English think about God ?"

M : "They believe in a formless God."

MASTER : "That is also one of our beliefs."

For a time Master and disciple remained silent. Then Sri Ramakrishna began to describe his experiences of Brahman.

MASTER : "One day I had the vision of Consciousness, non-dual and indivisible. At first it had been revealed to me that there were innumerable men, animals, and other creatures. Among them there were aristocrats, the English, the Mussalmans, myself, scavengers, dogs, and also a bearded Mussalman with an earthenware tray of rice in his hand. He put a few grains of rice into everybody's mouth. I too tasted a little.

"Another day I saw rice, vegetables, and other food-stuff, and filth and dirt as well, lying around. Suddenly the soul came out of my body and, like a flame, touched everything. It was like a protruding tongue of fire and tasted everything once, even the excreta. It was revealed to me that all these are one Substance, the non-dual and indivisible Consciousness.

"Another day it was revealed to me that I had devotees—my intimate companions, my very own. Thereafter I would climb to the roof of the kuthi as soon as the bells and the conch-shells of the evening service sounded in the temples, and cry out with a longing heart : 'Oh, where are you all ? Come here ! I am dying to see you !'

(To M.) "Well, what do you think of these visions ?"

M : "God sports through you. This I have realized, that you are the instrument and God is the Master. God has created other beings as if with a machine, but yourself with His own hands."

MASTER : "Well, Hazra says that after the vision of God one acquires the six divine powers."

M : "Those who seek pure love don't want powers."

MASTER : "Perhaps Hazra was a poor man in his previous life, and that is why he wants so much to see the manifestation of power. He wants to know what I talk about with the cook. He says to me : 'You don't have to talk to the cook. I shall talk to the manager of the temple myself and see that you get everything you want.' (M. laughs aloud.) He talks to me that way and I say nothing."

M : "Many a time you have said that a devotee who loves God for the sake of love does not care to see God's powers. A true devotee wants to see God as Gopala.⁴ In the beginning God becomes the magnet, and the devotee the needle. But in the end the devotee himself becomes the magnet, and God the needle ; that is to say, God becomes small to His devotee."

⁴ This happened before any of the Master's intimate disciples came to him.

⁵ The baby Krishna, bereft of all divine powers.

MASTER : "Yes, it is just like the sun at dawn. You can easily look at that sun. It doesn't dazzle the eyes ; rather it satisfies them. God becomes tender for the sake of His devotees. He appears before them, setting aside His powers."

Both remained silent for some time.

M : "Why should your visions not be real ? If they are unreal, then the world is still more unreal ; for there is only one mind that is the instrument of perception. Your pure mind sees those visions, and our ordinary minds see worldly objects."

MASTER : "I see that you have grasped the idea of unreality. Well, tell me what you think of Hazra."

M : "Oh, I don't know." (*The Master laughs.*)

MASTER : "Well, do you find me to be like anybody else ?"

M : "No, sir."

MASTER : "Like any other paramahansa ?"

M : "No, sir. You can't be compared to anybody else."

MASTER (*smiling*) : "Have you heard of a tree called the 'achina' ?"⁶

M : "No, sir."

MASTER : "There is a tree called by that name. But nobody knows what it is."

M : "Likewise, it is not possible to recognize you. The more a man understands you, the more uplifted he will be."

M. was silent. He said to himself : "The Master referred to 'the sun at dawn' and 'the tree unrecognizable by man'. Did he mean an Incarnation of God ? Is this the play of God through man ? Is the Master himself an Incarnation ? Was this why he cried to the devotees from the roof of the kuthi : 'Where are you ? Come to me !' ?"

Sri Ramakrishna was sitting on the steps of the southeast verandah of the Kali temple. Rakhal, M., and Hazra were with him. He talked light-heartedly about his boyhood days.

When it was dusk he returned to his room and sat down on the small couch. Soon he went into samadhi and in that state began to talk to the Divine Mother. He said : "Mother, what is all this row about ? Shall I go there ? I shall go if You take me." The Master was to go to a devotee's house. Was it for this that he was asking the Divine Mother's permission ?

Again he spoke to Her, perhaps praying about an intimate disciple : "Mother, please make him stainless. Well, Mother, why have You given him only a particle ?" Remaining silent a moment, he said : "Oh, I see. That will be enough for Your work."

In the same state he said, addressing the devotees : "That which is Brahman is verily Sakti. I address That, again, as the Mother. I call It Brahman when It is inactive, and Sakti when It creates, preserves, and destroys. It is like water, sometimes still and sometimes covered with waves. The Incarnation of God is a part of the lila of Sakti. The purpose of the Divine

⁶ Literally, "unrecognizable".

Incarnation is to teach man ecstatic love for God. The Incarnation is like the udder of the cow, the only place milk is to be got. God incarnates Himself as man. There is a great accumulation of divinity in an Incarnation, like the accumulation of fish in a deep hollow in a lake."

Some of the devotees wondered, "Is Sri Ramakrishna an Incarnation of God, like Krishna, Chaitanya, and Christ?"

Sunday, September 9, 1883

Sri Ramakrishna had finished his midday meal and was sitting on the small couch. Rakhal, M., and Ratan were sitting on the floor. Ratan was the steward of Jadu Mallick's garden house and was devoted to the Master. Now and then Ram Chatterji and Hazra passed in or out of the room. It was about two o'clock.

Ratan told the Master that a yatra performance by Nilkantha had been arranged in Jadu Mallick's house in Calcutta.

RATAN (*to the Master*) : "You must go. The date has been set."

MASTER : "That's good. I want to go. Nilkantha sings with great devotion."

A DEVOTEE : "That is true, sir."

MASTER : "Tears flow from his eyes as he sings. (*To Ratan*) I am thinking of spending the night in Calcutta when I go to see the yatra."

RATAN : "That will be fine."

Ram Chatterji and the other devotees asked Ratan about a theft in Jadu Mallick's house.

RATAN : "Yes, the golden sandals of the Deity were stolen from the shrine room in Jadu Babu's house. It has created an uproar. They are going to try to discover the thief by means of a 'charmed plate'. Everybody will sit in one room, and the plate will move in the direction of the man who stole the sandals."

MASTER (*with a smile*) : "How does the plate move? By itself?"

RATAN : "No. A man presses it to the ground."

A DEVOTEE : "It is a kind of sleight of hand. It is a clever trick."

MASTER : "The real cleverness is the cleverness by which one realizes God. That trick is the best of all tricks."

As the conversation went on, several Bengali gentlemen entered the room and, after saluting the Master, sat down. One of them was already known to Sri Ramakrishna. These gentlemen followed the cult of Tantra. The Master knew that one of them indulged in immoral acts in the name of religion. The Tantra rituals, under certain conditions, allow the mixing of men and women devotees. But Sri Ramakrishna regarded all women, even prostitutes, as manifestations of the Divine Mother. He addressed them all as "Mother".

MASTER (*with a smile*) : "Where is Achalananda? My ideal is different from that of Achalananda and his disciples. As for myself, I look on all women as my mother."

The visiting gentlemen sat silent.

MASTER : "Every woman is a mother to me. Achalananda used to stay here now and then. He would drink a great deal of consecrated wine. Hearing about my attitude toward women, he stubbornly justified his own views. He insisted again and again : 'Why should you not recognize the attitude of a "hero" toward women ? Won't you admit the injunctions of Siva ? Siva Himself is the author of the Tantra, which prescribes various disciplines, including the "heroic".' I said to him : 'But, my dear sir, I don't know. I don't like these ideas. To me every woman is a mother.'

"Achalananda did not support his own children. He said to me, 'God will support them.' I said nothing. But this is the way I felt about it : 'Who will support your children ? I hope your renunciation of wife and children is not a way of earning money. People will think you are a holy man because you have renounced everything ; so they will give you money. In that way you will earn plenty of money.'

"Spiritual practice with a view to winning a lawsuit and earning money, or to helping others win in court and acquire property, shows a very mean understanding.

"Money enables a man to get food and drink, build a house, worship the Deity, serve devotees and holy men, and help the poor when he happens to meet them. These are the good uses of money. Money is not meant for luxuries or creature comforts or for buying a position in society.

"People practise various Tantrik disciplines to acquire supernatural powers. How mean such people are ! Krishna said to Arjuna, 'Friend, by acquiring one of the eight siddhis you may add a little to your power, but you will not be able to realize Me.' One cannot get rid of maya as long as one exercises supernatural powers. And maya begets egotism.

"Body and wealth are impermanent. Why go to so much trouble for their sakes ? Just think of the plight of the hathayogis. Their attention is fixed on one ideal only—longevity. They do not aim at the realization of God at all. They practise such exercises as washing out the intestines, drinking milk through a tube, and the like, with that one aim in view.

"There was once a goldsmith whose tongue suddenly turned up and stuck to his palate. He looked like a man in samadhi. He became completely inert and remained so a long time. People came to worship him. After several years, his tongue suddenly returned to its natural position, and he became conscious of things as before. So he went back to his work as a goldsmith. (*All laugh.*)

"These are physical things and have nothing to do with God. There was a man who knew eighty-two postures and talked big about yoga-samadhi. But inwardly he was drawn to 'woman and gold'. Once he found a bank-note worth several thousand rupees. He could not resist the temptation, and swallowed it, thinking he would get it out somehow later on. The note was got out of him all right, but he was sent to jail for three years. In my guilelessness I used to think that the man had made great spiritual progress. Really, I say it upon my word !

"Mahendra Pal of Sinti once gave Ramlal five rupees. Ramlal told me about it after he had gone. I asked him what the gift was for, and Ramlal said that it was meant for me. I thought it might enable me to pay off some of my debt for milk. That night I went to bed and, if you will believe me, I suddenly woke up with a pain. I felt as if a cat were scratching inside my chest. I at once went to Ramlal and asked him : 'For whom did Mahendra give this money ? Was it for your aunt ?' 'No,' said Ramlal, 'it is meant for you.' I said to him, 'Go and return the money at once, or I shall have no peace of mind.' Ramlal returned the money early in the morning and I felt relieved.

"Once a rich man came here and said to me : 'Sir, you must do something so that I may win my lawsuit. I have heard of your reputation and so I have come here.' 'My dear sir,' I said to him, 'you have made a mistake. I am not the person you are looking for ; Achalananda is your man.'

"A true devotee of God does not care for such things as wealth or health. He thinks : 'Why should I practise spiritual austerities for creature comforts, money, or name and fame ? These are all impermanent. They last only a day or two.'"

The visiting gentlemen took leave of the Master after saluting him. When they had departed, Sri Ramakrishna smiled and said to M., "You can never make a thief listen to religion. (All laugh.)

"Well, what do you think of Narendra ?"

M : "He is splendid."

MASTER : "Yes. His intelligence is as great as his learning. Besides, he is gifted in music, both as a singer and player. Then too, he has control over his passions. He says he will never marry."

M : "You once said that one who constantly talks of his sin really becomes a sinner ; he cannot extricate himself from sin. But if a man has firm faith that he is the son of God, then he makes rapid strides in spiritual life."

MASTER : "Yes, faith. What tremendous faith Krishnakishore had ! He used to say : 'I have spoken the name of God once. That is enough. How can I remain a sinner ? I have become pure and stainless.' One day Haladhari said : 'Even Ajamil had to perform austerities to gratify God. Can one receive the grace of God without austerities ? What will one gain by speaking the name of Narayana only once ?' At these remarks Krishnakishore's anger knew no bounds. The next time he came to this garden to pick flowers he wouldn't even look at Haladhari.

"Haladhari's father was a great devotee. At bathing-time he would stand waist-deep in the water and meditate on God, uttering the sacred mantra; then the tears would flow from his eyes.

"One day a holy man came to the bathing-place on the Ganges at Ariadaha. We talked about seeing him. Haladhari said, 'What shall we gain by seeing the body of a man, a mere cage made of the five elements ?' Krishnakishore heard about it and said : "What ? Did Haladhari ask what would be gained by visiting a holy man ? By repeating the name of Krishna or Rama a

⁷ Referring to the Holy Mother, Sri Ramakrishna's wife.

man transforms his physical body into a spiritual body. To such a man everything is the embodiment of Spirit. To him Krishna is the embodiment of Spirit, and His sacred Abode is the embodiment of Spirit.' He also said, 'A man who utters the name of Krishna or Rama even once reaps the result of a hundred sandhyas.'

"One of his sons chanted the name of Rama on his death-bed. Krishnakishore said, 'He has nothing to worry about; he has chanted the name of Rama.' But now and then he wept. After all, it was the death of his own son.

"Nothing whatsoever is achieved by the performance of worship, japa, and devotions, without faith. Isn't that so?"

M : "Yes, sir. That is true."

MASTER : "I see people coming to the Ganges to bathe. They talk their heads off about everything under the sun. The widowed aunt says : 'Without me they cannot perform the Durga Puja. I have to look after even the smallest detail. Again, I have to supervise everything when there is a marriage festival in the family, even the bed of the bride and groom.'"

M : "Why should we blame them? How else will they pass the time?"

MASTER (with a smile) : "Some people have their shrine rooms in their attics. The women arrange the offerings and flowers and make the sandal-paste. But, while doing so, they never say a word about God. The burden of the conversation is : 'What shall we cook today? I couldn't get good vegetables in the market. That curry was delicious yesterday. That boy is my cousin. Hello there! Have you that job still? Don't ask me how I am. My Hari is no more.' Just fancy! They talk of such things in the shrine room at the time of worship!"

M : "Yes, sir, it is so in the majority of cases. As you say, can one who has passionate yearning for God continue formal worship and devotions for long?"

Sri Ramakrishna and M. were now conversing alone.

M : "Sir, if it is God Himself who has become everything, then why do people have so many different feelings?"

MASTER : "Undoubtedly God exists in all beings as the All-pervading Spirit, but the manifestations of His Power are different in different beings. In some places there is a manifestation of the power of Knowledge; in others, of the power of ignorance. In some places there is a greater manifestation of power than in others. Don't you see that among human beings there are cheats and gamblers, to say nothing of men who are like tigers. I think of them as the 'cheat God', the 'tiger God'."

M. (with a smile) : "We should salute them from a distance. If we go near the 'tiger God' and embrace him, he may devour us."

MASTER : "He and His Power, Brahman and Its Power—nothing else exists but this. In a hymn to Rama, Narada said : 'O Rama, You are Siva, and Sita is Bhagavati; You are Brahma, and Sita is Brahmani; You are Indra, and Sita is Indrani; You are Narayana, and Sita is Lakshmi. O Rama, You are the symbol of all that is masculine, and Sita of all that is feminine.'"

M : "Sir, what is the Spirit-form of God like?"

Sri Ramakrishna reflected a moment and said softly : " Shall I tell you what it is like ? It is like water. . . . One understands all this through spiritual discipline.

" Believe in the form of God. It is only after attaining Brahmajnana that one sees non-duality, the oneness of Brahman and Its Sakti. Brahman and Sakti are identical, like fire and its power to burn. When a man thinks of fire, he must also think of its power to burn. Again, when he thinks of the power to burn, he must also think of fire. Further, Brahman and Sakti are like milk and its whiteness, water and its wetness.

" But there is a stage beyond even Brahmajnana. After jnana comes vijnana. He who is aware of knowledge is also aware of ignorance. The sage Vasishtha was stricken with grief at the death of his hundred sons. Asked by Lakshmana why a man of knowledge should grieve for such a reason, Rama said, ' Brother, go beyond both knowledge and ignorance.' He who has knowledge has ignorance also. If a thorn has entered your foot, get another thorn and with its help take out the first ; then throw away the second also."

M : " Should one throw away both knowledge and ignorance ? "

MASTER : " Yes. That is why one should acquire vijnana. You see, he who is aware of light is also aware of darkness. He who is aware of happiness is also aware of suffering. He who is aware of virtue is also aware of vice. He who is aware of good is also aware of evil. He who is aware of holiness is also aware of unholiness. He who is aware of ' I ' is also aware of ' you '.

" What is vijnana ? It is knowing God in a special way. The awareness and conviction that fire exists in wood is jnana, knowledge. But to cook rice on that fire, eat the rice, and get nourishment from it is vijnana. To know by one's inner experience that God exists is jnana. But to talk to Him, to enjoy Him as Child, as Friend, as Master, as Beloved, is vijnana. The realization that God alone has become the universe and all living beings is vijnana.

" According to one school of thought, God cannot be seen. Who sees whom ? Is God outside you, that you can see Him ? One sees only oneself. Having once entered the ' black waters ' of the ocean, the ship does not come back and so cannot describe what it experiences."

M : " It is true, sir. As you say, having climbed to the top of the monument, one becomes unaware of what is below : horses and carriages, men and women, houses, shops and offices, and so on."

MASTER : " I don't go to the Kali temple nowadays. Is that an offence ? At one time Narendra used to say, ' What ? He still goes to the Kali temple ! '

M : " Every day you are in a new state of mind. How can you ever offend God ? "

MASTER : " Someone said to Sen, about Hriday : ' He is very ill. Please bring two pieces of cloth and a couple of shirts for him. We will send them to his village. Sen offered only two rupees. How do you explain that ? He has so much money, and yet he is so miserly ! What do you say to that ? '

M : " Those who seek God cannot behave that way—I mean those whose goal is the attainment of Knowledge."

MASTER : " God alone is the Reality and all else is unreal."

Saturday, September 22, 1883

Sri Ramakrishna was seated in the drawing-room of Adhar's house in Calcutta, with Rakhal, Adhar, M., Ishan, and other devotees. Many gentlemen of the neighbourhood were also present. It was afternoon.

The Master was very fond of Ishan. He had been a superintendent in the Accountant General's office, and later on his children also occupied high government positions. One of them was a class-mate of Narendra. Ishan's purse was always open for the poor and needy. When he retired from service, he devoted his time to spiritual practices and charity. He often visited Sri Ramakrishna at Dakshineswar.

MASTER (*to Ishan*) : "Please tell us the story of the boy who posted the letter."

ISHAN (*with a smile*) : "A boy once heard that God is our Creator. So he wrote a letter to God, setting forth his prayers, and posted it. The address he put on the envelope was 'Heaven'."

MASTER (*with a smile*) : "Did you hear that story? One succeeds in spiritual life when one develops a faith like that boy's. (*To Ishan*) Tell us about the renunciation of activities."

ISHAN : "After the attainment of God, religious duties such as the sandhya drop away. One day some people were sitting on the bank of the Ganges performing the sandhya. But one of them abstained from it. On being asked the reason, he said : 'I am observing asoucha. I cannot perform the sandhya ceremony.' In my case the defilement is due to both a birth and a death. My mother, Ignorance, is dead, and my son, Self-Knowledge, has been born."

MASTER : "Tell us, also, how caste distinctions drop away when one attains Self-Knowledge."

ISHAN : "Sankaracharya was once climbing the steps after finishing his bath in the Ganges, when he saw just in front of him an untouchable who had a pack of dogs with him. 'You have touched me!' said Sankara. 'Revered sir,' said the pariah, 'I have not touched you, nor have you touched me. The Self is the Inner Ruler of all beings and cannot be contaminated. Is there any difference between the sun's reflection in wine and its reflection in the Ganges?'"

MASTER (*with a smile*) : "And about harmony : how one can realize God through all paths."

ISHAN (*smiling*) : "Both Hari and Hara are derived from the same root.⁹ The difference is only in the pratyaya.¹⁰ In reality, He who is Hari is also Hara. If a man has faith in God, then it doesn't matter whom he worships."

MASTER : "And please tell us also how the heart of the sadhu is the greatest of all."

⁹ Asoucha is a temporary defilement caused by the birth or death of a blood relative. A man observing asoucha cannot perform the sandhya, or daily worship.

¹⁰ The root "hari", from which both words are derived. Further, Hari and Hara are two manifestations of the same Godhead. Hari is a name of Vishnu, the Ideal Deity of the Vaishnavas, and Hara a name of Siva, the Ideal Deity of the Saivas.

¹⁰ There is a pun on this word, which means both "faith" and "inflection".

ISHAN : "This earth is the largest thing we see anywhere around us. But larger than the earth is the ocean, and larger than the ocean is the sky. But Vishnu, the Godhead, has covered earth, sky, and the nether world with one of His feet. And that foot of Vishnu is enshrined in the sadhu's heart. Therefore the heart of a holy man is the greatest of all."

The devotees were delighted with Ishan's words.

Ishan intended to retire to a solitary place and practise a special discipline of the Gayatri, through which Brahman is invoked. But the Master said that the Knowledge of Brahman was not possible without the complete destruction of worldliness. Further, he said that it was impossible for a man totally to withdraw his mind from the objects of the senses in the Kaliyuga, when his life was dependent on food. That is why the Master discouraged people from attempting the Vedic worship of Brahman and asked them to worship Sakti, the Divine Mother, who is identical with Brahman.

MASTER (to Ishan) : Why do you waste your time simply repeating 'Neti, neti'? Nothing whatsoever can be specified about Brahman, except that It exists.

"Whatever we see or think about is the manifestation of the glory of the Primordial Energy, the Primal Consciousness. Creation, preservation, and destruction, living beings and the universe, and further, meditation and the meditator, bhakti and prema—all these are manifestations of the glory of that Power.

"But Brahman is identical with Its Power. On returning from Ceylon, Hanuman praised Rama, saying : 'O Rama, You are the Supreme Brahman, and Sita is Your Sakti. You and She are identical.' Brahman and Sakti are like the snake and its wriggling motion. Thinking of the snake, one must think of its wriggling motion, and thinking of its wriggling motion, one must think of the snake. Or they are like milk and its whiteness. Thinking of milk, one has to think of its colour, that is, whiteness, and thinking of the whiteness of milk, one has to think of milk itself. Or they are like water and its wetness. Thinking of water, one has to think of its wetness, and thinking of the wetness of water, one has to think of water.

"This primal Power, Mahamaya, has covered Brahman. As soon as the covering is withdrawn, one realizes : 'I am what I was before', 'I am Thou ; Thou art I'.

"As long as that covering remains, the Vedantic formula 'I am He', that is, man is the Supreme Brahman, does not rightly apply. The wave is part of the water, but the water is not part of the wave. As long as that covering remains, one should call on God as Mother. Addressing God, the devotee should say. 'Thou art the Mother and I am Thy child ; Thou art the Master and I am Thy servant.' It is good to have the attitude of the servant toward the master. From this relationship of master and servant spring up other attitudes : the attitude of serene love for God, the attitude of friend toward friend, and so forth. When the master loves his servant, he may say to him, 'Come, sit by my side ; there is no difference between you and me.'

But if the servant comes forward of his own will to sit by the master, will not the master be angry?

"God's play on earth as an Incarnation is the manifestation of the glory of the Chitsakti, the Divine Power. That which is Brahman is also Rama, Krishna, and Siva."

ISHAN : "Yes, sir. Both Hari and Hara are derived from the same root. The difference lies only in the pratyaya."

MASTER : "Yes, there is only One without a second. The Vedas speak of It as 'Om Satchidananda Brahma' the Puranas as 'Om Satchidananda Krishna', and the Tantra as 'Om Satchidananda Siva'."

"The Chitsakti, as Mahamaya, has deluded all with ignorance. It is said in the *Adhyatma Ramayana* that when the rishis saw Rama, they prayed to Him in these words only : 'O Rama, please do not delude us with Your world-bewitching maya.'"

ISHAN : "What is this maya ?"

MASTER : "Whatever you see, think, or hear is maya. In a word, 'woman and gold' is the covering of maya."

"There is no harm in chewing betel-leaf, eating fish, smoking, or rubbing the body with oil. What will one achieve by renouncing only these things ? The one thing needful is the renunciation of 'woman and gold'. That renunciation is the real and supreme renunciation. Householders should go into solitude now and then, to practise spiritual discipline in order to cultivate devotion to God ; they should renounce mentally. But the sannyasi should renounce both mentally and physically."

"I once said to Keshab, 'How can a typhoid patient be cured if he remains in a room where a pitcher of water and a jar of pickles are kept ?' Now and then one should live in solitude."

A DEVOTEE : "Sir, what do you think of the Navavidhan ? It seems to me like a hotchpotch of everything."

MASTER : "Some say it is a modern thing. That sets me wondering : 'Then is the God of the Brahmo Samaj a new God ?' The Brahmos speak of their cult as the Navavidhan, as a New Dispensation. Well, it may be so. Who knows ? There are six systems of philosophy ; so perhaps it is like one of these."

"But do you know where those who speak of the formless God make their mistake ? It is where they say that God is formless only, and that those who differ with them are wrong."

"But I know that God is both with and without form. And He may have many more aspects. It is possible for Him to be everything."

(To Ishan) "The Chitsakti, Mahamaya, has become the twenty-four cosmic principles. One day as I was meditating, my mind wandered away to Rashke's house. He is a scavenger. I said to my mind, 'Stay there, you rogue !' The Divine Mother revealed to me that the men and women in this house were mere masks ; inside them was the same Divine Power, Kundalini, that rises up through the six spiritual centres of the body."

"Is the Primal Energy man or woman? Once at Kamarpukur I saw the worship of Kali in the house of the Lahas. They put a sacred thread¹¹ on the image of the Divine Mother. One man asked, 'Why have they put the sacred thread on the Mother's person?' The master of the house said: 'Brother, I see that you have rightly understood the Mother. But I do not yet know whether the Divine Mother is male or female.'

"It is said that Mahamaya swallowed Siva. When the six centres in Her were awakened, Siva came out through Her thigh. Then Siva created the Tantra philosophy.

"Take refuge in the Chitsakti, the Mahamaya."

ISHAN: "Please bestow your grace on me."

MASTER: "Say to God with a guileless heart, 'O God, reveal Thyself to me.' And weep. Pray to God, 'O God, keep my mind away from 'woman and gold'. And dive deep. Can a man get pearls by floating or swimming on the surface? He must dive deep."

"One must get instruction from a guru. Once a man was looking for a stone image of Siva. Someone said to him: 'Go to certain river. There you will find a tree. Near it is a whirlpool. Dive into the water there, and you will find the image of Siva.' So I say that one must get instruction from a teacher."

ISHAN: "That is true, sir."

MASTER: "It is Satchidananda that comes to us in the form of the guru. If a man is initiated by a human guru, he will not achieve anything if he regards his guru as a mere man. The guru should be regarded as the direct manifestation of God. Only then can the disciple have faith in the mantra given by the guru. Once a man has faith he achieves all. The sudra Ekalavya learnt archery in the forest before a clay image of Drona. He worshipped the image as the living Drona: that by itself enabled him to attain mastery in archery."

"Don't mix intimately with brahmin pundits. Their only concern is to earn money. I have seen brahmin priests reciting the *Chandi* while performing the swastyayana. It is hard to tell whether they are reading the sacred book or something else. They turn half the pages without reading them. (*All laugh.*)

"A nail-knife suffices to kill oneself. One needs sword and shield to kill others. That is the purpose of the sastras.

"One doesn't really need to study the different scriptures. If one has no discrimination, one doesn't achieve anything through mere scholarship, even though one studies all the six systems of philosophy. Call on God, crying to Him secretly in solitude. He will give all that you need."

Sri Ramakrishna had heard that Ishan was building a house on the bank of the Ganges for the practice of spiritual discipline. He asked Ishan eagerly: "Has the house been built? Let me tell you that the less people know of your spiritual life, the better it will be for you." Devotees endowed with sattva meditate in a secluded corner or in a forest, or withdraw into the mind. Sometimes they meditate inside the mosquito net."

¹¹ See foot-note 9, p. 195.

Now and then Ishan invited Hazra to his house. Hazra had a craze for outward purity. Sri Ramakrishna often discouraged him in this.

MASTER (*to Ishan*) : "Let me tell you another thing. Don't be over-fastidious about outward purity. Once a sadhu felt very thirsty. A water-carrier was carrying water in his skin water-bag, and offered the water to the holy man. The sadhu asked if the skin was clean. The carrier said : 'Revered sir, my skin bag is perfectly clean. But inside *your skin* are all sorts of filthy things. That is why I can ask you to drink water from my skin. It won't injure you.' By '*your skin*', the carrier meant the body, the belly, and so forth."

"Have faith in the name of God. Then you won't need even to go to holy places."

Sri Ramakrishna sang, intoxicated with divine fervour :

Why should I go to Ganga or Gaya, to Kasi, Kanchi, or Prabhas,
So long as I can breathe my last with Kali's name upon my
lips ? . . .

Ishan remained silent.

MASTER (*to Ishan*) : "Tell me if you have any more doubts."

ISHAN : "You said everything when you spoke of faith."

MASTER : "God can be realized by true faith alone. And the realization is hastened if you believe everything about God. The cow that picks and chooses its food gives milk only in dribblets, but if she eats all kinds of plants, then her milk flows in torrents."

"Once I heard a story. A man heard the command of God that he should see his Ideal Deity in a ram. He at once believed it. It is God who exists in all beings."

"A guru said to his disciple, 'It is Rama alone who resides in all bodies.' The disciple was a man of great faith. One day a dog snatched a piece of bread from him and started to run away. He ran after the dog, with a jar of butter in his hand, and cried again and again : 'O Rama, stand still a minute. That bread hasn't been buttered.'

"What tremendous faith Krishnakishore had ! He used to say, 'By chanting "Om Krishna, Om Rama", one gets the result of a million sandhyas.' Once he said to me secretly, 'I don't like the sandhya and other devotions any more ; but don't tell anyone.'

"Sometimes I too feel that way. The Mother reveals to me that She Herself has become everything. One day I was coming from the pine-grove toward the Panchavati. A dog followed me. I stood still for a while near the Panchavati. The thought came to my mind that the Mother might say something to me through that dog.

"You were absolutely right when you said that through faith alone one achieves all."

ISHAN : "But we are householders."

MASTER : "What if you are ? Through His grace even the impossible becomes possible. Ramprasad sang, 'This world is a mere framework of illusion.' Another man composed a song by way of reply :

This very world is a mansion of mirth ;
Here I can eat, here drink and make merry.
Janaka's might was unsurpassed ;
What did he lack of the world or the Spirit ?
Holding to one as well as the other,
He drank his milk from a brimming cup !

"One should first realize God through spiritual discipline in solitude, and then live in the world. Only then can one be a King Janaka. What can you achieve otherwise ?

"Further, take the case of Siva. He has everything—Kartika, Ganesa, Lakshmi, and Sarasvati. Still, sometimes He dances in a state of divine fervour, chanting the name of Rama, and sometimes He is absorbed in samadhi."

XIV

INSTRUCTION TO VAISHNAVAS AND BRAHMOS

Sunday, September 23, 1883

SRI RAMAKRISHNA was sitting in his room at Dakshineswar with Rakhal, M., and other devotees. Hazra sat on the porch outside. The Master was conversing with the devotees.

MASTER (*to a devotee*) : "Narendra doesn't like even you, nowadays. (*To M.*) Why didn't he come to see me at Adhar's house ?

"How versatile Narendra is ! He is gifted in singing, in playing on instruments, and in studies. He is independent and doesn't care about anybody. The other day he was returning to Calcutta with Captain in his carriage. Captain begged Narendra to sit beside him, but he took a seat opposite. He didn't even look at Captain.

"What can a man achieve through mere scholarship ? What is needed is prayer and spiritual discipline. Gauri of Indesh was both a scholar and a devotee. He was a worshipper of the Divine Mother. Now and then he would be overpowered with spiritual fervour. When he chanted a hymn to the Mother, the pundits would seem like earth-worms beside him. I too would be overcome with ecstasy.

"At first he was a bigoted worshipper of Sakti. He used to pick up tulsi-leaves¹ with a couple of sticks, so as not to touch them with his fingers. (*All laugh.*) Then he went home. When he came back he didn't behave that way any more. He gave remarkable interpretations of Hindu mythology. He would say that the ten heads of Ravana represented the ten organs. Kumbhakarna was the symbol of tamas, Ravana of rajas, and Bibhishana of sattva. That was why Bibhishana obtained favour with Rama."

After the Master's midday meal, while he was resting, Ram, Tarak,² and some other devotees arrived from Calcutta.

Nityagopal, Tarak, and several others were staying with Ram, a householder disciple of the Master. Nityagopal was always in an exalted spiritual mood. Tarak's mind, too, was always indrawn ; he seldom exchanged words with others. Ram looked after their physical needs. Rakhal now and then spent a few days at Adhar's house.

¹ These leaves are sacred to Vishnu. The bigoted worshipper of Sakti hates everything associated with Vishnu, and vice versa.

² A monastic disciple of the Master, known later as Swami Shivananda.

RAM (*to the Master*) : "We have been taking lessons on the drum."

MASTER (*to Ram*) : "Nityagopal too?"

RAM : "No, sir. He plays a little."

MASTER : "And Tarak?"

RAM : "He knows a good deal."

MASTER : "Then he won't keep his eyes on the ground so much.

If the mind is much directed to something else, it doesn't dwell deeply on God."

RAM : "I have been studying the drum only to accompany the kirtan."

MASTER (*to M.*) : "I hear that you too are taking singing lessons. Is that so?"

M : "No, sir. I just open my mouth now and then."

MASTER : "Have you practised that song : 'O Mother, make me mad with Thy love?' If you have, please sing it. The song expresses my ideal perfectly."

The conversation turned to Hazra's hatred for certain people, which Sri Ramakrishna did not like.

MASTER (*to the devotees*) : "I used frequently to visit a certain house at Kamarpukur. The boys of the family were of my age. The other day they came here and spent two or three days with me. Their mother, like Hazra, used to hate people. Then something happened to her foot, and gangrene set in. On account of the foul smell, no one could enter her room. I told the incident to Hazra and asked him not to hate anyone."

Toward evening, as Sri Ramakrishna was standing in the northwest corner of the courtyard, he went into samadhi. In those days the Master remained almost always in an ecstatic state. He would lose consciousness of the world at the slightest suggestion from outside. But for scant conversation with visiting devotees, he remained in an indrawn mood and was unable to perform his daily worship and devotions.

Coming down to the relative world, he began to talk to the Divine Mother, still standing where he was. "O Mother," he said, "worship has left me, and japa also. Please see, Mother, that I do not become an inert thing. Let my attitude toward God be that of the servant toward the master. O Mother, let me talk about Thee and chant Thy holy name. I want to sing Thy glories. Give me a little strength of body that I may move about, that I may go to places where Thy devotees live, and sing Thy name."

In the morning Sri Ramakrishna had been to the Kali temple to offer flowers at the Mother's feet. *

Continuing, the Master said : "O Mother, I offered flowers at Thy feet this morning. I thought : 'That is good. My mind is again going back to formal worship.' Then why do I feel like this now? Why art Thou turning me into a sort of inert thing?"

The moon had not yet risen. It was a dark night. The master, still in an abstracted mood, sat on the small couch in his room and continued his talk with the Divine Mother. He said : "Why this special discipline of the Gayatri? Why this jumping from this roof to that? . . . Who told him to

do it ? Perhaps he is doing it of his own accord . . . Well, he will practise a little of that discipline."

The previous day Sri Ramakrishna had discouraged Ishan about Vedic worship, saying that it was not suitable for the Kaliyuga. He had asked Ishan to worship God as the Divine Mother.

The Master said to M., "Are these all my fancies, or are they real ?" M. remained silent with wonder at the Master's intimate relationship with the Divine Mother. He thought She must be within us as well as without. Indeed She must be very near us ; or why should the Master speak to Her in a whisper ?

Wednesday, September 26, 1883

There were very few devotees with the Master, for most of them came on Sundays. Rakhal and Latu were living with him the greater part of the time. M. arrived in the afternoon and found the Master seated on the small couch. The conversation turned to Narendra.

MASTER (*to M.*) : "Have you seen Narendra lately ? (*With a smile*) He said of me : 'He still goes to the Kali temple. But he will not when he truly understands.' His people are very much dissatisfied with him because he comes here now and then. The other day he came here in a hired carriage, and Surendra paid for it. Narendra's aunt almost had a row with Surendra about it."

The Master left the couch and went to the northeast verandah, where Hazra, Kishori, Rakhal, and a few other devotees were sitting.

MASTER (*to M.*) : "How is it that you are here today ? Have you no school ?"

M : "Our school closed today at half past one."

MASTER : "Why so early ?"

M : "Vidyasagar visited the school. He owns the school. So the boys get a half holiday whenever he comes."

MASTER : "Why doesn't Vidyasagar keep his word ? 'If one who holds to truth and looks on woman as his mother does not realize God, then Tulsi is a liar.'³ If a man holds to truth he will certainly realize God. The other day Vidyasagar said he would come here and visit me. But he hasn't kept his word."

"There is a big difference between a scholar and a holy man. The mind of a mere scholar is fixed on 'woman and gold', but the sadhu's mind is on the Lotus Feet of Hari. A scholar says one thing and does another. But it is quite a different matter with a sadhu. The words and actions of a man who has given his mind to the Lotus Feet of God are altogether different. In Benares I saw a young sannyasi who belonged to the sect of Nanak. He was the same age as you. He used to refer to me as the 'loving monk'. His sect has a monastery in Benares. I was invited there one day. I found that the mohant was like a housewife. I asked him, 'What is the way ?' For the Kaliyuga,' he said, 'the path of devotion as enjoined by Narada.' 'He was

³ A quotation from the sayings of Tulsidas, a great sage and poet.

reading a book. When the reading was over, he recited : ' Vishnu is in water, Vishnu is on land, Vishnu is on the mountain top ; the whole world is pervaded by Vishnu.' At the end he said, ' Peace ! Peace ! Abiding Peace !'

"One day he was reading the *Gita*. He was so strict about his monastic rules that he would not read a holy book looking at a worldly man. So he turned his face toward me and his back on Mathur, who was also present. It was this holy man who told me of Narada's path of devotion as suited to the people of the Kaliyuga."

M : "Are not sadhus of his class followers of the Vedanta ?"

MASTER : "Yes, they are. But they also accept the path of devotion. The fact is that in the Kaliyuga one cannot wholly follow the path laid down in the Vedas. Once a man said to me that he would perform the purascharana of the Gayatri. I said : ' Why don't you do that according to the Tantra ? In the Kaliyuga the discipline of Tantra is very efficacious.'

"It is extremely difficult to perform the rites enjoined in the Vedas. Further, at the present time people lead the life of slaves.¹ It is said that those who serve others for twelve years or so become slaves. They acquire the traits of those they serve. While serving their masters they acquire the rajas, the tamas, the spirit of violence, the love of luxury, and the other traits of their masters. Not only do they serve their masters, but they also enjoy a pension after their term of service is over.

"Once a Vedantic monk came here. He used to dance at the sight of a cloud. He would go into an ecstasy of joy over a rain-storm. He would get very angry if anyone went near him when he meditated. One day I came to him while he was meditating, and that made him very cross. He discriminated constantly, ' Brahman alone is real and the world is illusory.' Since the appearance of diversity is due to maya, he walked about with a prism from a chandelier in his hand. One sees different colours through the prism ; in reality there is no such thing as colour. Likewise, nothing exists, in reality, except Brahman. But there is an appearance of the manifold because of maya, egoism. He would not look at an object more than once, lest he should be deluded by maya and attachment. He would discriminate, while taking his bath, at the sight of birds flying in the sky. He knew grammar. He stayed here for three days. One day he heard the sound of a flute near the embankment and said that a man who had realized Brahman would go into samadhi at such a sound."

While talking about the monk, the Master showed his devotees the manners and movements of a paramahamsa : the gait of a child, face beaming with laughter, eyes swimming in joy, and body completely naked. Then he again took his seat on the small couch and poured out his soul-enthralling words.

MASTER (*to M.*) : "I learnt Vedanta from Nangta : ' Brahman alone is real ; the world is illusory.' The magician performs his magic. He produces a mango-tree which even bears mangoes. But this is all sleight of hand. The magician alone is real."

¹ Perhaps the Master was referring to the foreign rule in India.

M : "It seems that the whole of life is a long sleep. This much I understand, that we are not seeing things rightly. We perceive the world with a mind by which we cannot comprehend even the nature of the sky. So how can our perceptions be correct ?"

MASTER : "There is another way of looking at it. We do not see the sky rightly. It looks as if the sky were touching the ground at the horizon. How can a man see correctly ? His mind is delirious, like the mind of a typhoid patient."

The Master sang in his sweet voice :

What a delirious fever is this that I suffer from !
O Mother, Thy grace is my only cure. . . .

Continuing, the Master said : "Truly it is a state of delirium. Just see how worldly men quarrel among themselves. No one knows what they quarrel about. Oh, how they quarrel ! 'May such and such a thing befall you !' How much shouting ! How much abuse !"

M : "I said to Kishori : 'The box is empty ; there is nothing inside. But two men pull at it from either side, thinking the box contains money.' Well, the body alone is the cause of all this mischief, isn't it ? The jnanis see all this and say to themselves, 'What a relief one feels when this pillow-case of the body drops off.'"

The Master and M. went toward the Kali temple.

MASTER : "Why should you say such things ? This world may be a 'frame-work of illusion,' but it is also said that it is a 'mansion of mirth.' Let the body remain. One can also turn this world into a mansion of mirth."

M : "But where is unbroken bliss in this world ?"

MASTER : "Yes, where is it ?"

Sri Ramakrishna stood in front of the shrine of Kali and prostrated himself before the Divine Mother. M. followed him. Then the Master sat on the lower floor in front of the shrine room, facing the blissful image, and leaned against a pillar of the natmandir. He wore a red-bordered cloth, part of which was on his shoulder and back. M. sat by his side.

M : "Since there is no unbroken happiness in the world, why should one assume a body at all ? I know that the body is meant only to reap the results of past action. But who knows what sort of action it is performing now ? The unfortunate part is that we are being crushed."

MASTER : "If a pea falls into filth, it grows into a pea-plant none the less."

M : "But still there are the eight bonds."

MASTER : "They are not eight bonds, but eight fetters. But what if they are ? These fetters fall off in a moment, by the grace of God. Do you know what it is like ? Suppose a room has been kept dark a thousand years. The moment a man brings a light into it, the darkness vanishes. Not little by little. Haven't you seen the magician's feat ? He takes a string with many knots, and ties one end to something, keeping the other in his hand. Then he shakes the string once or twice, and immediately all the knots come

undone. But another man cannot untie the knots however he may try. All the knots of ignorance come undone in the twinkling of an eye, through the guru's grace.

"Well, can you tell me why Keshab Sen has changed so much lately? He used to come here very often. He learnt here how to bow low before a holy man. One day I told him that one should not salute a holy man as he had been doing. Harish says rightly: 'All the cheques must be approved here. Only then will they be cashed in the bank.'" (Laughter.)

M. listened to these words breathlessly. He began to realize that Satchidananda, in the form of the guru, passes the "cheque".

MASTER : "Do not reason. Who can ever know God? I have heard it from Nangta, once for all, that this whole universe is only a fragment of Brahman.

"Hazra is given to too much calculation. He says, 'This much of God has become the universe and this much is the balance.' My head aches at his calculations. I know that I know nothing. Sometimes I think of God as good, and sometimes as bad. What can I know of Him?"

M : "It is true, sir. Can anyone ever know God? Each thinks, with his little bit of intelligence, that he has understood all of God. As you say, an ant went to a sugar hill and, finding that one grain of sugar filled its stomach, thought that the next time it would take the entire hill into its hole."

MASTER : "Who can ever know God? I don't even try. I only call on Him as Mother. Let Mother do whatever She likes. I shall know Her if it is Her will; but I shall be happy to remain ignorant if She wills otherwise. My nature is that of a kitten. It only cries, 'Mew, mew!' The rest it leaves to its mother. The mother cat puts the kitten sometimes in the kitchen and sometimes on the master's bed. The young child wants only his mother. He doesn't know how wealthy his mother is, and he doesn't even want to know. He knows only, 'I have a mother; why should I worry?' Even the child of the maid-servant knows that he has a mother. If he quarrels with the son of the master, he says: 'I shall tell my mother. I have a mother.' My attitude, too, is that of a child."

Suddenly Sri Ramakrishna caught M.'s attention and said, touching his own chest: "Well, there must be something here. Isn't that so?"

M. looked wonderingly at the Master. He said to himself: "Does the Mother Herself dwell in the Master's heart? Is it the Divine Mother who has assumed this human body for the welfare of humanity?"

Sri Ramakrishna was praying to the Divine Mother: "O Mother! O Embodiment of Om! Mother, how many things people say about Thee! But I don't understand any of them. I don't know anything, Mother. I have taken refuge at Thy feet. I have sought protection in Thee. O Mother; I pray only that I may have pure love for Thy Lotus Feet, love that seeks no return. And Mother, do not delude me with Thy world-bewitching maya. I seek Thy protection. I have taken refuge in Thee."

The evening worship in the temples was over. Sri Ramakrishna was again seated in his room with M.

M. had been visiting the Master for the past two years and had received his grace and blessings. He had been told that God was both with form and without form, that He assumed forms for the sake of His devotees. To the worshipper of the formless God, the Master said : " Hold to your conviction, but remember that all is possible with God. He has form, and again, He is formless. He can be many things more."

MASTER (to M.) : " You have accepted an ideal, that of God without form—isn't that so ? "

M : " Yes, sir. But I also believe what you say—that all is possible with God. It is quite possible for God to have forms."

MASTER : " Good. Remember further that, as Consciousness, He pervades the entire universe of the living and non-living."

M : " I think of Him as the consciousness in conscious beings."

MASTER : " Stick to that ideal now. There is no need of tearing down and changing one's attitude. You will gradually come to realize that the consciousness in conscious beings is the Consciousness of God. He alone is Consciousness."

" Let me ask you one thing. Do you feel attracted to money and treasures ? "

M : " No, sir. But I think of earning money in order to be free from anxiety, to be able to think of God without worry."

MASTER : " Oh, that's perfectly natural."

M : " Is it greed ? I don't think so."

MASTER : " You are right. Otherwise, who will look after your children ? What will become of them if you feel that you are not the doer ? "

M : " I have heard that one cannot attain Knowledge as long as one has the consciousness of duty. Duty is like the scorching sun."

MASTER : " Keep your present attitude. It will be different when the consciousness of duty drops away of itself."

They remained silent a few minutes.

M : " To enter the world after attaining partial knowledge ! Why, it is like dying in full consciousness, as in cholera ! "

MASTER : " Oh, Ram ! Ram ! "

The idea in M.'s mind was that just as a cholera patient feels excruciating pain at the time of death, because of retaining consciousness, so also a jnani with partial knowledge must feel extremely miserable leading the life of the world, which he knows to be illusory.

M : " People who are completely ignorant are like typhoid patients, who remain unconscious at the time of death and so do not feel the pain."

MASTER : " Tell me, what does one attain through money ? Jaygopal Sen is such a wealthy man ; but he complains that his children don't obey him."

M : " Is poverty the only painful thing in the world ? There are the six passions besides. Then disease and grief."

MASTER : " And also name and fame, the desire to win people's recognition. Well, what do you think my attitude is ? "

M : "It is like that of a man just awakened from sleep. He becomes aware of himself. You are always united with God."

MASTER : "Do you ever dream of me ?"

M : "Yes, sir. Many times."

MASTER : "How ? Did you dream of me as giving you instruction ?"

M. remained silent.

MASTER : "If you ever see me instructing you, then know that it is Satchidananda Himself that does so."

M. related his dream experiences to Sri Ramakrishna, who listened to them attentively.

MASTER (*to M.*) : "That is very good. Don't reason any more. You are a follower of Sakti."

Wednesday, October 10, 1883

Adhar had invited the Master to come to his house on the occasion of the Durga Puja festival. It was the third day of the worship of the Divine Mother. When Sri Ramakrishna arrived at Adhar's house, he found Adhar's friend Sarada, Balaram's father, and Adhar's neighbours and relatives waiting for him.

The Master went into the worship hall to see the evening worship. When it was over, he remained standing there in an abstracted mood and sang in praise of the Divine Mother :

Out of my deep affliction rescue me, O Redeemer !
Terrified by the threats of the King of Death am I !
Left to myself, I shall perish soon ;
Save me, oh, save me now, I pray !

Mother of all the worlds ! Thou, the Support of mankind !
Thou, the Bewitcher of all, the Mother of all that has life !
Vrindavan's charming Radha art Thou,
Dearest playmate of Braja's Beloved.

Blissful comrade of Krishna, well-spring of Krishna's lila,
Child of Himalaya, best of the gopis, beloved of Govinda !
Sacred Ganga, Giver of moksha !
Sakti ! The universe sings Thy praise.

Thou art the Spouse of Siva, the Ever-blessed, the All ;
Sometimes Thou takest form and sometimes art absolute.
Eternal Beloved of Mahadeva,
Who can fathom Thine infinite glories ?

The Master went to Adhar's drawing-room on the second floor and took a seat, surrounded by the guests. Still in a mood of divine fervour, he said : "Gentlemen, I have eaten. Now go and enjoy the feast." Was the Master hinting that the Divine Mother had partaken of Adhar's offering ? Did he identify himself with the Divine Mother and therefore say, "I have eaten" ?

Then, addressing the Divine Mother, he continued : "Shall I eat, O Mother ? Or will You eat ? O Mother, the very Embodiment of the Wine of

Divine Bliss ! " Did the Master look on himself as one with the Divine Mother ? Had the Mother incarnated Herself as the Son to instruct mankind in the ways of God ? Was this why the Master said, " I have eaten " ?

In that state of divine ecstasy Sri Ramakrishna saw the six centres in his body, and the Divine Mother dwelling in them. He sang a song to that effect.

Again he sang :

My mind is overwhelmed with wonder,
Pondering the Mother's mystery ;
Her very name removes
The fear of Kala, Death himself ;
Beneath Her feet lies Maha-Kala.

Why should Her hue be kala, black ?
Many the forms of black, but She
Appears astoundingly black ;
When contemplated in the heart,
She lights the lotus that blossoms there.

Her form is black, and She is named
Kali, the Black One. Blacker than black
Is She ! Beholding Her,
Man is bewitched for evermore ;
No other form can he enjoy.

In wonderment asks Ramprasad :
Where dwells this Woman so amazing ?
At Her mere name, his mind
Becomes at once absorbed in Her,
Though he has never yet beheld Her.

The fear of the devotees flies away if they but seek shelter at the feet of the Divine Mother. Was that why the Master sang the following song ?

I have surrendered my soul at the fearless feet of the Mother ;
Am I afraid of Death any more ?
Unto the tuft of hair on my head
Is tied the almighty mantra, Mother Kali's name.
My body I have sold in the market-place of the world
And with it have bought Sri Durga's name.

Deep within my heart I have planted the name of Kali,
The Wish-fulfilling Tree of heaven ;
When Yama, King of Death, appears,
To him I shall open my heart and show it growing there.
I have cast out from me my six unflagging foes ;
Ready am I to sail life's sea,
Crying, " To Durga, victory ! "

Sarada was stricken with grief on account of his son's death. So Adhar had taken him to Dakshineswar to visit the Master. Sarada was a devotee of Sri Chaitanya. Sri Ramakrishna looked at him and was inspired with the ideal of Gauranga.

⁵ The six passions.

He sang :

Why has My body turned so golden ? It is not time for this to be :
 Many the ages that must pass, before as Gauranga I appear.
 Here in the age of Dwapara My sport is not yet at an end ;
 How strange this transformation is !

The peacock glistens, all of gold ; and golden, too, the cuckoo
 gleams !
 Everything around Me here has turned to gold ! Naught else appears
 But gold, whichever way I look.
 What can it mean, this miracle, that everything I see is gold ?

Ah, I can guess its meaning now :
 Radha has come to Mathura¹ and that is why My skin is gold.
 For she is like the bhramara,² and so has given Me her hue.
 Dark blue My body was but now ; yet in the twinkling of an eye
 It turned to gold. Have I become Radha by contemplating her ?

I cannot imagine where I am—in Mathura or Navadvip.
 But how could this have come to pass ?
 Not yet is Balarama born as Nitai, nor has Narada
 Become Srivas, nor Yasoda as Mother Sachi yet returned.
 Then why should I, among them all, alone assume a golden face ?
 Not yet is Father Nanda born as Jagannath ;³ then why should I
 Be thus transmuted into gold ?
 Perhaps because in Mathura sweet Radha has appeared, My skin
 Has borrowed Gauranga's golden hue.

Sri Ramakrishna sang again, still overpowered with the ideal of
 Gauranga :

Surely Gauranga is lost in a state of blissful ecstasy :
 In an exuberance of joy, he laughs and weeps and dances and sings.
 He takes a wood for Vrindavan, the Ganges for the blue Jamuna ;
 Loudly he sobs and weeps. Yet, though he is all gold without,
 He is all black within—black with the blackness of Krishna !

The Master continued to sing, assuming the attitude of a woman devotee
 infatuated with love for Gauranga :

Why do my neighbours raise such a scandal ?
 Why do they cast aspersions upon me
 Simply because of Gauranga ?
 How can they understand my feelings ?
 How can I ever explain ?
 Can I ever explain at all ?
 Alas, to whom shall I explain it ?
 Ah, but they make me die of shame !

¹ The song represents the words of Gauranga in the mood of Krishna. Gauranga, who had a golden complexion, is regarded as an Incarnation of Krishna.

² The capital of Krishna's kingdom, where He lived after leaving Vrindavan.

³ According to a Hindu legend, the cockroach, by intently meditating upon the bhramara, becomes transformed into the latter.

⁴ Sachi and Jagannath were Gauranga's parents; Yasoda and Nanda were Krishna's parents.

Once on a time, at the house of Srivas,
 Gora was loudly singing the kirtan,
 When, on the ground of the courtyard,
 Falling, he rolled in an ecstasy.
 I, who was standing near him,
 Seeing him where he lay entranced,
 Was suddenly lost to outward sense,
 Until the wife of Srivas revived me.

Another day, in the bhaktas' procession,
 Gora was sweetly singing the kirtan ;
 Clasping the outcastes to him,
 He softened the unbelievers' hearts.
 Through Nadia's market-place
 He chanted Lord Hari's holy name.
 I followed the throng, and from close by
 Caught a glimpse of his golden feet.

Once by the Ganges' bank he stood,
 His body bright as the sun and moon,
 Charming all with his beauty.
 I too had come, to fetch some water,
 And, as I looked from one side,
 My water-jar slipped and fell to the ground.
 My sister-in-law, the gossip, saw me,
 And now she is spreading it everywhere.

Balarama's father was a Vaishnava ; hence the Master also sang of the divine love of the gopis for their beloved Krishna :

I have not found my Krishna, O friend ! How cheerless my home without Him !

Ah, if Krishna could only be the hair upon my head,
 Carefully I should braid it then, and deck it with bakul-flowers ;
 Carefully I should fashion the braids out of my Krishna-hair.
 Krishna is black, and black is my hair ; black would be one with black !

Ah, if Krishna could only be the ring I wear in my nose,
 Always from my nose He would hang, and my two lips could touch Him.

But it can never be, alas ! Why should I idly dream ?
 Why should Krishna care at all to be the ring in my nose ?

Ah, if Krishna could only be the bracelets on my arms,
 Always He would cling to my wrists, and proudly I should walk,
 Shaking my bracelets to make them sound, shaking my arms to show them ;

Down the kings' highway I should walk, wearing my Krishna-bracelets.

Balarama's father was a wealthy man with estates in different parts of Orissa. An orthodox member of the Vaishnava sect, he had built temples and arranged for distribution of food to the pilgrims at various holy places. He had been spending the last years of his life in Vrindavan. The Vaishnavas, for the most part, are bigoted in their religious views. Some of them harbour

malicious feelings toward the followers of the Tantra and Vedanta. But Sri Ramakrishna never encouraged such a narrow outlook. According to his teachings, through earnestness and yearning all lovers of God will ultimately reach the same goal. The Master began the conversation in order to broaden the religious views of Balaram's father.

MASTER (*to M.*) : "Once I thought, 'Why should I be one-sided ?' Therefore I was initiated into Vaishnavism in Vrindavan and took the garb of a Vaishnava monk. I spent three days practising the Vaishnava discipline. Again at Dakshineswar I was initiated into the mystery of Rama worship. I painted my forehead with a long mark and put on a string with a diamond round my neck. But after a few days I gave them up.

"A certain man had a tub. People would come to him to have their clothes dyed. The tub contained a solution of dye. Whatever colour a man wanted for his cloth, he would get by dipping the cloth in the tub. One man was amazed to see this and said to the dyer, 'Please give me the dye you have in your tub.'

Was the Master hinting that people professing different religions would come to him and have their spiritual consciousness awakened according to their own ideals ?

MASTER (*to Balaram's father*) : "Don't read books any more. But you may read books on devotion, such as the life of Chaitanya.

"The whole thing is to love God and taste His sweetness. He is sweetness and the devotee is its enjoyer. The devotee drinks the sweet Bliss of God. Further, God is the lotus and the devotee the bee. The devotee sips the honey of the lotus.

"As a devotee cannot live without God, so also God cannot live without His devotee. Then the devotee becomes the sweetness, and God its enjoyer. The devotee becomes the lotus, and God the bee. It is the Godhead that has become these two in order to enjoy Its own Bliss. That is the significance of the episode of Radha and Krishna."

"At the beginning of spiritual life the devotee should observe such rites as pilgrimage, putting a string of beads around his neck, and so forth. But outward ceremonies gradually drop off as he attains the goal, the vision of God. Then his only activity is the repetition of God's name, and contemplation and meditation on Him.

"The pennies equivalent to sixteen rupees make a great heap. But sixteen silver coins do not look like such a big amount. Again, the quantity becomes much smaller when you change the sixteen rupees into one gold mohur. And if you change the gold into a tiny piece of diamond, people hardly notice it."

Orthodox Vaishnavas insist on the outer insignia of religion. They criticize any devotee who does not wear these marks. Was that why the Master said that, after the vision of God, a devotee becomes indifferent to outer marks, giving up formal worship when the goal of spiritual life is attained ?

¹⁰ According to one school of the Vaishnava religion, the Supreme God Himself became Radha and Krishna in order to enjoy the bliss of their mutual communion.

MASTER (to Balaram's father) : "The Kartabhajas group the devotees into four classes : the pravartaka, the sadhaka, the siddha, and the siddha of the siddha. The pravartaka, the beginner, puts the mark of his religion on his forehead, wears a string of beads around his neck, and observes other outer conventions. The sadhaka, the struggling devotee, does not care so much for elaborate rites. An example of this class is the Baul. The siddha, the perfect, firmly believes that God exists. The siddha of the siddha, the supremely perfect, like Chaitanya, not only has realized God but also has become intimate with Him and talks with Him all the time. This is the last limit of realization.

"There are many kinds of spiritual aspirants. Those endowed with sattva perform their spiritual practices secretly. They look like ordinary people, but they meditate inside the mosquito net.

"Aspirants endowed with rajas exhibit outward pomp—a string of beads around the neck, a mark on the forehead, an ochre robe, a silk cloth, a rosary with a gold bead, and so on. They are like stall-keepers advertising their wares with signboards.

"All religions and all paths call upon their followers to pray to one and the same God. Therefore one should not show disrespect to any religion or religious opinion. It is God alone who is called Satchidananda Brahman in the Vedas, Satchidananda Krishna in the Puranas, and Satchidananda Siva in the Tantras. It is one and the same Satchidananda.

"There are different sects of Vaishnavas. That which is called Brahman in the Vedas is called Alekh-Niranjan by one Vaishnava sect. 'Alekh' means that which cannot be pointed out or perceived by the sense-organs. According to this sect, Radha and Krishna are only two bubbles of the Alekh.

"According to the Vedanta," there is no Incarnation of God. The Vedantists say that Rama and Krishna are but two waves in the Ocean of Satchidananda.

"In reality there are not two. There is only One. A man may call on God by any name ; if he is sincere in his prayer he will certainly reach Him. He will succeed if he has longing."

As Sri Ramakrishna spoke these words to the devotees, he was overwhelmed with divine fervour. Coming down to partial consciousness of the world, he said to Balaram's father, "Are you the father of Balaram ?"

All sat in silence. Balaram's aged father was silently telling his beads.

MASTER (to M. and the others) : "Well, these people practise so much japa and go to so many sacred places, but why are they like this ? Why do they make no progress ? In their case it seems as if the year consists of eighteen months.

"Once I said to Harish : 'What is the use of going to Benares if one does not feel restless for God ? And if one feels that longing, then this very place is Benares.'

"They make so many pilgrimages and repeat the name of God so much, but why do they not realize anything ? It is because they have no longing

¹¹ A reference to the Advaita Vedanta.

for God. God reveals Himself to the devotee if only he calls upon Him with a longing heart.

"At the beginning of a yatra performance much light-hearted restlessness is to be observed on the stage. At that time one does not see Krishna. Next the sage Narada enters with his lute and sings longingly, 'O Govinda! O my Life! O my Soul!' Then Krishna can no longer remain away and appears with the cowherd boys."

Tuesday, October 16, 1883

Sri Ramakrishna was in his room with Rakhal, Balaram's father, Beni Pal, M., Mani Mallick, Ishan, Kishori, and other devotees.

MASTER : "Liberal-minded devotees accept all the forms of God : Krishna, Kali, Siva, Rama, and so on."

BALARAM'S FATHER : "Yes, sir. It is like a woman's recognizing her husband, whatever clothes he wears."

MASTER : "But again, there is a thing called nishtha, single-minded devotion. When the gopis went to Mathura they saw Krishna with a turban on His head. At this they pulled down their veils and said : 'Who is this man? Where is our Krishna with the peacock feather on His crest and the yellow cloth on His body?' Hanuman also had that unswerving devotion. He came to Dwaraka in the cycle of Dwapara. Krishna said to Rukmini, His queen, 'Hanuman will not be satisfied unless he sees the form of Rama.' So, to please Hanuman, Krishna assumed the form of Rama.

"But, my dear sir, I am in a peculiar state of mind. My mind constantly descends from the Absolute to the Relative, and again ascends from the Relative to the Absolute.

"The attainment of the Absolute is called the Knowledge of Brahman. But it is extremely difficult to acquire. A man cannot acquire the Knowledge of Brahman unless he completely rids himself of his attachment to the world. When the Divine Mother was born as the daughter of King Himalaya, She showed Her various forms to Her father. The king said, 'I want to see Brahman.' Thereupon the Divine Mother said : 'Father, if that is your desire, then you must seek the company of holy men. You must go into solitude, away from the world, and now and then live in holy company.'

"The manifold has come from the One alone, the Relative from the Absolute. There is a state of consciousness where the many disappears, and the One, as well ; for the many must exist as long as the One exists. Brahman is without comparison. It is impossible to explain Brahman by analogy. It is between light and darkness. It is Light, but not the light that we perceive, not material light.

"Again, when God changes the state of my mind, when He brings my mind down to the plane of the Relative, I perceive that it is He who has become all these—the Creator, maya, the living beings, and the universe.

"Again, sometimes He shows me that He has created the universe and all living beings. He is the Master, and the universe His garden.

"He is the Master, and the universe and all its living beings belong to Him"—that is Knowledge. And, 'I am the doer', 'I am the guru', 'I am the father'—that is ignorance. 'This is my house ; this is my family ; this is my wealth ; these are my relatives'—this also is ignorance."

BALARAM'S FATHER : "That is true, sir."

MASTER : "As long as you do not feel that God is the Master, you must come back to the world, you must be born again and again. There will be no rebirth when you can truly say, 'O God, Thou art the Master.' As long as you cannot say, 'O Lord, Thou alone art real', you will not be released from the life of the world. This going and coming, this rebirth, is inevitable. There will be no liberation. Further, what can you achieve by saying, 'It is mine'? The manager of an estate may say, 'This is our garden ; these are our couches and furniture.' But when he is dismissed by the master, he hasn't the right to take away even a chest of worthless mango-wood given to him for his use.

"The feeling of 'I and mine' has covered the Reality. Because of this we do not see Truth. Attainment of Chaitanya, Divine Consciousness, is not possible without the knowledge of Advaita, Non-duality. After realizing Chaitanya one enjoys Nityananda, Eternal Bliss. One enjoys this Bliss after attaining the state of a paramahamsa.

"Vedanta does not recognize the Incarnation of God. According to it, Chaitanyadeva is only a bubble of the non-dual Brahman.

"Do you know what the vision of Divine Consciousness is like? It is like the sudden illumination of a dark room when a match is struck.

"The Incarnation of God is accepted by those who follow the path of bhakti. A woman belonging to the Kartabhaja sect observed my condition and remarked : 'You have inner realization. Don't dance and sing too much. Ripe grapes must be preserved carefully in cotton. The mother-in-law lessens her daughter-in-law's activities when the daughter-in-law is with child. One characteristic of God-realization is that the activities of a man with such realization gradually drop away. Inside this man [meaning Sri Ramakrishna] is the real Jewel.'

"Watching me eat, she remarked, 'Sir, are you yourself eating, or are you feeding someone else?'

"The feeling of ego has covered the Truth. Narendra once said, 'As the "I" of man recedes, the "I" of God approaches.' Kedar says, 'The more clay there is in the jar, the less water it holds.'

"Krishna said to Arjuna : 'Brother, you will not realize Me if you possess even one of the eight siddhis.' These give only a little power. With healing and the like one may do only a little good to others. Isn't that true?

"Therefore I prayed to the Divine Mother for pure love only, a love that does not seek any return. I never asked for occult powers."

While talking thus, Sri Ramakrishna went into samadhi. He sat there motionless, completely forgetful of the outer world. Then, coming down to the sense world, he sang :

Ah, friend ! I have not found Him yet, whose love has driven me mad. . . .

At the Master's request, Ramal sang a song describing how Chaitanya embraced the monastic life :

Oh, what a vision I have beheld in Keshab Bharati's¹² hut !
 Gora, in all his matchless grace,
 Shedding tears in a thousand streams !
 Like a mad elephant
 He dances in ecstasy and sings,
 Drunk with an overwhelming love.

Rolling flat upon the ground and swimming in his tears,
 He weeps and shouts Lord Hari's name,
 Piercing the very heavens with his cries,
 Loud as a lion's roar ;
 Then most humbly he begs men's love,
 To feel himself the servant of God.

Shorn of his locks, he has put on the yogi's ochre robe ;
 Even the hardest heart must melt
 To see his pure and heavenly love.
 Smitten by man's deep woe,
 He has abandoned everything
 And pours out love unstintingly,

Oh, would that Premdas were his slave and, passing from door
 to door,
 Might sing Gauranga's endless praise !

The Master asked Mani Mallick to quote the words of Tulsidas to the effect that one who had developed love of God could not observe caste distinctions.

MANI : "The throat of the chatak bird is pierced with thirst. All around are the waters of the Ganges, the Jamuna, the Saraju, and of innumerable other rivers and lakes ; but the bird will not touch any of these. It only looks up expectantly for the rain that falls when the star Svati is in the ascendant."

MASTER : "That means that love for the Lotus Feet of God is alone real, and all else illusory."

MANI : "Tulsi also said : 'At the touch of the philosopher's stone, the eight metals become gold. Likewise all castes, even the butcher and the untouchable, become pure by repeating Hari's name. Without Hari's name the people of the four castes are but butchers.'

MASTER : "The hide that the scriptures forbid one to touch can be taken inside the temple after it has been tanned.

"Man becomes pure by repeating the name of God. Therefore one should practise the chanting of God's name. I said to Jadu Mallick's mother : 'In the hour of death you will think only of worldly things—of family, children, executing the will, and so forth. The thought of God will not come to your mind. The way to remember God in the hour of death is to practise, now, the

¹² The monastic teacher of Sri Chaitanya.

repetition of His name and the chanting of His glories. If one keeps up this practice, then in the hour of death one will repeat the name of God. When the cat pounces upon the bird, the bird only squawks and does not say, 'Rama, Rama, Hare-Krishna.'

"It is good to prepare for death. One should constantly think of God and chant His name in solitude during the last years of one's life. If the elephant is put into the stable after its bath it is not soiled again by dirt and dust."

Balaram's father, Mani Mallick, and Beni Pal were all elderly men. Did the Master give this instruction especially for their benefit?

MASTER : "Why do I ask you to think of God and chant His name in solitude? Living in the world day and night, one suffers from worries. Haven't you noticed brother killing brother for a foot of land? The Sikhs said to me, 'The cause of all worry and confusion is these three: land, woman, and money.'

"You are leading a householder's life. Why should you be afraid of the world? When Rama said to Dasaratha that He was going to renounce the world, it worried His father, and the king sought counsel of Vasishtha. Vasishtha said to Rama: 'Rama, why should You give up the world? Reason with me. Is this world outside God? What is there to renounce and what is there to accept? Nothing whatever exists but God. It is Brahman alone that appears as Isvara, maya, living beings, and the universe.'"

BALARAM'S FATHER : "It is very difficult, sir."

MASTER : "The aspirant, while practising spiritual discipline, looks upon the world as a 'framework of illusion'. Again, after the attainment of Knowledge, the vision of God, this very world becomes to him a 'mansion of mirth'.

"It is written in the books of the Vaishnavas: 'God can be attained through faith alone; reasoning pushes Him far away.' Faith alone!

"What faith Krishnakishore had! At Vrindavan a low-caste man drew water for him from a well. Krishnakishore said to him, 'Repeat the name of Siva.' After the man had repeated the name of Siva, Krishnakishore unhesitatingly drank the water. He used to say: 'If a man chants the name of God, does he need to spend money any more for the atonement of his sins? How foolish!' He was amazed to see people worshipping God with the sacred tulsi-leaf in order to get rid of their illnesses. At the bathing-ghat here he said to us, 'Please bless me, that I may pass my days repeating Rama's holy name.' Whenever I went to his house he would dance with joy at the sight of me. Rama said to Lakshmana, 'Brother, whenever you find people singing and dancing in the ecstasy of divine love, know for certain that I am there.' Chaitanya is an example of such ecstatic love. He laughed and wept and danced and sang in divine ecstasy. He was an Incarnation. God incarnated Himself through Chaitanya."

Sri Ramakrishna sang a song describing the divine love of Chaitanya. Then Balaram's father, Mani Mallick, Beni Pal, and several other devotees took leave of the Master.

In the evening, devotees from Kansaritola, Calcutta, arrived. The Master danced and sang with them in a state of divine fervour. After dancing,

he went into a spiritual mood and said, "I shall go part of the way myself." Kishori came forward to massage his feet, but the Master did not allow anyone to touch him.

Ishan arrived. The Master was seated, still in a spiritual mood. After a while he became engaged in talk with Ishan. It was Ishan's desire to practise the purascharana of the Gayatri.

MASTER (*to Ishan*) : "Follow your own intuition. I hope there is no more doubt in your mind. Is there any? The path of the Vedas is not meant for the Kaliyuga. The path of Tantra is efficacious."

ISHAN : "I have almost resolved to perform an atonement ceremony."

MASTER : "Do you mean to say that one cannot follow the path of Tantra? That which is Brahman is also Sakti, Kali."

Knowing the secret that Kali is one with the highest Brahman, I have discarded, once for all, both righteousness and sin.

ISHAN : "It is mentioned in a hymn in the *Chandi* that Brahman alone is the Primal Energy. Brahman is identical with Sakti."

MASTER : "It will not do simply to express that idea in words. Only when you assimilate it will all be well with you."

"When the heart becomes pure through the practice of spiritual discipline, then one rightly feels that God alone is the Doer. He alone has become mind, life, and intelligence. We are only His instruments."

*Thou it is that holdest the elephant in the mire ;
Thou, that helpest the lame man scale the loftiest hill.*

"When your heart becomes pure, then you will realize that it is God who makes us perform such rites as the purascharana.

Thou workest Thine own work ; men only call it theirs.

"All doubts disappear after the realization of God. Then the devotee meets the favourable wind. He becomes free from worry. He is like the boatman who, when the favourable wind blows, unfurls the sail, holds the rudder lightly, and enjoys a smoke."

Ishan took his leave and Sri Ramakrishna talked with M. No one else was present. He asked M. what he thought of Narendra, Rakhal, Adhar, and Hazra, and whether they were guileless. "And", asked the Master, "what do you think of me?"

M. said : "You are simple and at the same time deep. It is extremely difficult to understand you."

Sri Ramakrishna laughed.

November 26, 1883

It was the day of the annual festival of the Sinduriapatti Brahmo Samaj. The ceremony was to be performed in Manilal Mallick's house. The worship hall was beautifully decorated with flowers, wreaths, and evergreens, and many devotees were assembled, eagerly awaiting the worship. Their

enthusiasm had been greatly heightened by the news that Sri Ramakrishna was going to grace the occasion with his presence. Keshab, Vijay, Shivanath, and other leaders of the Brahmo Samaj held him in high respect. His God-intoxicated state of mind, his intense love of spiritual life, his burning faith, his intimate communion with God, and his respect for women, whom he regarded as veritable manifestations of the Divine Mother, together with the unsullied purity of his character, his complete renunciation of worldly talk, his love and respect for all religious faiths, and his eagerness to meet devotees of all creeds, attracted the members of the Brahmo Samaj to him. Devotees came that day from far-off places to join the festival, for it would give them a chance to get a glimpse of the Master and listen to his inspiring talk.

Sri Ramakrishna arrived at the house before the worship began, and became engaged in conversation with Vijaykrishna Goswami and the other devotees. The lamps were lighted and the divine service was about to begin.

The Master asked if Shivanath would come to the festival. A Brahmo devotee said that he had other important things to do and was not coming.

MASTER : "I feel very happy when I see Shivanath. He always seems to be absorbed in the bliss of bhakti. Further, a man who is respected by so many surely possesses some divine power. But he has one great defect : he doesn't keep his word. Once he said to me that he would come to Dakshineswar, but he neither came nor sent me word. That is not good. It is said that truthfulness alone constitutes the spiritual discipline of the Kaliyuga. ■ a man clings tenaciously to truth he ultimately realizes God. Without this regard for truth, one gradually loses everything. If by chance I say that I will go to the pine-grove, I must go there even if there is no further need of it, lest I lose my attachment to truth. After my vision of the Divine Mother, I prayed to Her, taking a flower in my hands : 'Mother, here is Thy knowledge and here is Thy ignorance. Take them both, and give me only pure love. Here is Thy holiness and here is Thy unholiness. Take them both, Mother, and give me pure love. Here is Thy good and here is Thy evil. Take them both, Mother, and give me pure love. Here is Thy righteousness and here is Thy unrighteousness. Take them both, Mother, and give me pure love.' I mentioned all these, but I could not say : 'Mother, here is Thy truth and here is Thy falsehood. Take them both.' I gave up everything at Her feet but could not bring myself to give up truth."

Soon the service began according to the rules of the Brahmo Samaj. The preacher was seated on the dais. After the opening prayer he recited holy texts of the Vedas and was joined by the congregation in the invocation to the Supreme Brahman. They chanted in chorus : "Brahman is Truth, Knowledge, and Infinity. It shines as Bliss and Immortality. Brahman is Peace, Blessedness, the One without a Second ; It is pure and unstained by sin." The minds of the devotees were stilled, and they closed their eyes in meditation.

The Master went into deep samadhi. He sat there transfixed and speechless. After some time he opened his eyes, looked around, and suddenly stood up with the words "Brahma ! Brahma !" on his lips. Soon the devotional music began, accompanied by drums and cymbals. In a state of divine fervour

the Master began to dance with the devotees. Vijay and the other Brahmos danced around him. The guests and the devotees were enchanted. Many of them drank the sweet bliss of God's name and forgot the world. The happiness of the material world appeared bitter to them, at least for the time being.

After the kirtan all sat around the Master, eager to hear his words.

MASTER : "It is difficult to lead the life of a householder in a spirit of detachment. Once Pratap" said to me : 'Sir, we follow the example of King Janaka. He led the life of a householder in a detached spirit. We shall follow him.' I said to him : 'Can one be like King Janaka by merely wishing it ? How many austerities he practised in order to acquire divine knowledge ! He practised the most intense form of asceticism for many years and only then returned to the life of the world.'

"Is there, then, no hope for householders ? Certainly there is. They must practise spiritual discipline in solitude for some days. Thus they will acquire knowledge and devotion. Then it will not hurt them to lead the life of the world. But when you practise discipline in solitude, keep yourself entirely away from your family. You must not allow your wife, son, daughter, mother father, sister, brother, friends, or relatives near you. While thus practising discipline in solitude, you should think : 'I have no one else in the world. God is my all.' You must also pray to Him, with tears in your eyes, for knowledge and devotion.

"If you ask me how long you should live in solitude away from your family, I should say that it would be good for you if you could spend even one day in such a manner. Three days at a time are still better. One may live in solitude for twelve days, a month, three months, or a year, according to one's convenience and ability. One hasn't much to fear if one leads the life of a householder after attaining knowledge and devotion.

"If you break jack-fruit after rubbing your hands with oil, then its sticky milk will not smear your hands. While playing the game of hide-and-seek, you are safe if you but once touch the 'granny'. Be turned into gold by touching the philosopher's stone. After that you may remain buried underground a thousand years ; when you are taken out you will still be gold.

"The mind is like milk. If you keep the mind in the world, which is like water, then the milk and water will get mixed. That is why people keep milk in a quiet place and let it set into curd, and then churn butter from it. Likewise, through spiritual discipline practised in solitude, churn the butter of knowledge and devotion from the milk of the mind. Then that butter can easily be kept in the water of the world. It will not get mixed with the world. The mind will float detached on the water of the world."

Vijay had just returned from Gaya, where he had spent a long time in solitude and holy company. He had put on the ochre robe of a monk and was in an exalted state of mind, always indrawn. He was sitting before the Master with his head bent down, as if absorbed in some deep thought.

Casting his benign glance on Vijay, the Master said : "Vijay, have you found your room ?

* Pratap Chandra Mazumdar, a celebrated leader of the Brahmo Samaj.

XV

LAST VISIT TO KESHAB

Wednesday, November 28, 1883

AT TWO O'CLOCK in the afternoon, M. was pacing the foot-path of the Circular Road in front of the Lily Cottage, where Keshab Chandra Sen lived. He was eagerly awaiting the arrival of Sri Ramakrishna. Keshab's illness had taken a serious turn, and there was very little chance of his recovery. Since the Master loved Keshab dearly, he was coming from Dakshineswar to pay him a visit.

On the east side of the Circular Road was Victoria College, where the ladies of Keshab's Brahmo Samaj and their daughters received their education. To the north of the college was a spacious garden house inhabited by an English family. M. noticed that there was a commotion in the house and wondered what was going on. Presently a hearse arrived with the drivers dressed in black, and the members of the household appeared, looking very sad. There had been a death in the family.

"Whither does the soul go, leaving behind this mortal body?" Pondering the age-old question, M. waited, watching the carriages that came from the north.

About five o'clock a carriage stopped in front of the Lily Cottage and Sri Ramakrishna got out with Latu and several other devotees, including Rakhal. He was received by Keshab's relatives, who led him and the devotees upstairs to the verandah south of the drawing-room. The Master seated himself on a couch.

After a long wait he became impatient to see Keshab. Keshab's disciples said that he was resting and would be there presently. Sri Ramakrishna became more and more impatient and said to Keshab's disciples : "Look here, what need is there of his coming to me? Why can't I go in and see him?"

PRASANNA (*humblly*) : "Sir, he will come in a few minutes."

MASTER : "Go away! It is you who are making all this fuss. Let me go in."

Prasanna began to talk about Keshab in order to divert the Master's attention. He said : "Keshab is now an altogether different person. Like you, sir, he talks to the Divine Mother. He hears what the Mother says, and laughs and cries."

When he was told that Keshab talked to the Divine Mother and laughed and cried, the Master became ecstatic. Presently he went into samadhi.

It was winter and the Master was wearing a green flannel coat with a shawl thrown over it. He sat straight, with his eyes fixed, deep in ecstasy. A long time passed in this way. There was no indication of his returning to the normal plane of consciousness.

Gradually it became dark. Lamps were lighted in the drawing-room, where the Master was now to go. While he was slowly coming down to the plane of ordinary consciousness, he was taken there, though with great difficulty. The room was well furnished. At the sight of the furniture, the Master muttered to himself, "These things were necessary before, but of what use are they now?" Seeing Rakhal, he said, "Oh, hello! Are you here?" Then, seating himself on a couch, he again lost consciousness of the outer world, and, looking around as if seeing someone, he said: "Hello, Mother! I see that You too have come. How You are showing off in Your Benares sari! Don't bother me now, please. Sit down and be quiet."

The Master was in a state of intense divine intoxication. In the well-lighted room the Brahmo devotees sat around the Master: Latu, Rakhal, and M. remained near him. He was saying to himself, still filled with divine fervour: "The body and the soul! The body was born and it will die. But for the soul there is no death. It is like the betel-nut. When the nut is ripe it does not stick to the shell. But when it is green it is difficult to separate it from the shell. After realizing God, one does not identify oneself any more with the body. Then one knows that body and soul are two different things."

At this moment Keshab entered the room. He came through the east door. Those who remembered the man who had preached in the Town Hall or the Brahmo Samaj temple were shocked to see this skeleton covered with skin. He could hardly stand. He walked holding to the wall for support. With great difficulty he sat down in front of the couch. In the mean time Sri Ramakrishna had got down from the couch and was sitting on the floor. Keshab bowed low before the Master and remained in that position a long time, touching the Master's feet with his forehead. Then he sat up. Sri Ramakrishna was still in a state of ecstasy. He muttered to himself. He talked to the Divine Mother.

Raising his voice, Keshab said: "I am here, sir. I am here." He took Sri Ramakrishna's left hand and stroked it gently. But the Master was in deep samadhi, completely intoxicated with divine love. A stream of words came from his lips as he talked to himself, and the devotees listened to him spell-bound.

MASTER: "As long as a man associates himself with upadhis, so long he sees the manifold, such as Keshab, Prasanna, Amrita, and so on; but on attaining Perfect Knowledge he sees only one Consciousness everywhere. The same Perfect Knowledge, again, makes him realize that the one Consciousness has become the universe and its living beings and the twenty-four cosmic principles. But the manifestations of Divine Power are different in different beings. It is He, undoubtedly, who has become everything; but in some cases there is a greater manifestation than in others."



SRI RAMAKRISHNA IN SAMADHI

During a kirtan at Keshab Sen's house. (The Master is supported by Hriday.)

* Vidyasagar once asked me, 'Can it be true that God has endowed some with greater power and some with less?' I replied : 'If that were not so, how is it that one man may be stronger than fifty? If that were not the case, again, how is it that we have all come here to see you?'

"The soul through which God sports is endowed with His special power. The landlord may reside in any part of his estate, but he is generally to be found in a particular drawing-room. The devotee is God's drawing-room. God loves to sport in the heart of His devotee. It is there that His special power is manifest.

"What is the sign of such a devotee? When you see a man doing great works, you may know that God's special power is manifested through him.

"The Primordial Power and the Supreme Brahman are identical. You can never think of the one without the other. They are like the gem and its brilliance. One cannot think of the brilliance without the gem, or of the gem without its brilliance. Again, it is like the snake and its wriggling motion. One cannot think of the wriggling motion without the snake, or of the snake without its wriggling motion.

"It is the Primordial Power that has become the universe and its living beings and the twenty-four cosmic principles. It is a case of involution and evolution.¹

"Why do I feel so restless for Rakhal, Narendra, and the other youngsters? Hazra once asked me, 'When will you think of God if you are always anxious about these boys?' (*Keshab and the others smile.*) That worried me greatly. I prayed to the Divine Mother : 'Mother, see what a fix I am in! Hazra scolds me because I worry about these young men.' Afterwards I asked Bholanath about it. He said to me that such a state of mind is described in the *Mahabharata*. How else will a man established in samadhi occupy his mind in the phenomenal world, after coming down from samadhi? That is why he seeks the company of devotees endowed with sattva. I gave a sigh of relief when Bholanath told me of the *Mahabharata*.

"Hazra is not to blame. During the period of struggle one should follow the method of discrimination—'Not this, not this'—and direct the whole mind to God. But the state of perfection is quite different. After reaching God one reaffirms what formerly one denied. To extract butter you must separate it from the buttermilk. Then you discover that butter and buttermilk are intrinsically related to one another. They belong to the same stuff. The butter is not essentially different from the buttermilk, nor the buttermilk essentially different from the butter. After realizing God one knows definitely that it is He who has become everything. In some objects He is manifested more clearly, and in others less clearly.

"When a flood comes from the ocean, all the land is deep under water. Before the flood, the boat could have reached the ocean only by following the winding course of the river. But after the flood, one can row straight to the

¹ That is to say, before the creation the universe and its living beings and the twenty-four cosmic principles lie involved in the Primordial Power, and after the creation these gradually evolve from It.

ocean. One need not take a roundabout course. After the harvest has been reaped, one need not take the roundabout course along the balk of the field. One can cross the field at any point.

"After the realization of God, He is seen in all beings. But His greater manifestation is in man. Again, among men, God manifests Himself more clearly in those devotees who are sattvic, in those who have no desire whatever to enjoy 'woman and gold'. Where can a man of samadhi rest his mind, after coming down from the plane of samadhi? That is why he feels the need of seeking the company of pure-hearted devotees, endowed with sattva and free from attachment to 'woman and gold'. How else could such a person occupy himself in the relative plane of consciousness?

"He who is Brahman is the Adyaskti, the Primal Energy. When inactive He is called Brahman, the Purusha; He is called Sakti, or Prakriti, when engaged in creation, preservation, and destruction. These are the two aspects of Reality: Purusha and Prakriti. He who is the Purusha is also Prakriti. Both are the embodiment of Bliss.

"If you are aware of the Male Principle, you cannot ignore the Female Principle. He who is aware of the father must also think of the mother. (Keshab laughs.) He who knows darkness also knows light. He who knows night also knows day. He who knows happiness also knows misery. You understand this, don't you?"

KESHAB: "Yes, sir. I do."

MASTER: "My Mother! Who is my Mother? Ah, She is the Mother of the Universe. It is She who creates and preserves the world, who always protects Her children, and who grants whatever they desire: dharma, artha, kama, moksha. A true son cannot live away from his mother. The mother knows everything. The child only eats, drinks, and makes merry; he doesn't worry himself about the things of the world."

KESHAB: "Yes, sir. It is quite true."

While talking, Sri Ramakrishna regained the normal consciousness of the world. With a smile on his face he conversed with Keshab. The roomful of men watched them eagerly, and listened to their words. Everybody was amazed to find that neither Keshab nor the Master inquired about each other's health. They talked only of God.

MASTER (to Keshab): "Why do the members of the Brahmo Samaj dwell so much on God's glories? Is there any great need of repeating such things as 'O God, Thou hast created the moon, the sun, and the stars'? Most people are filled with admiration for the garden only. How few care to see its owner! Who is greater, the garden or its owner?"

"After a few drinks at a tavern, do I care to know how many gallons of wine are stored there? One bottle is enough for me."

"When I met Narendra, I never asked him: 'Who is your father? How many houses does he own?'

"Shall I tell you the truth? Man loves his own riches, and so he thinks that God loves His, too. He thinks that God will be pleased if we glorify His riches. Once Sambhu said to me, 'Please bless me, that I may die

leaving my riches at the Lotus Feet of God.' I answered : 'These are riches only to you. What riches can you offer God ? To Him these are mere dust and straw.'

"Once a thief broke into the temple of Vishnu and robbed the image of its jewels. Mathur Babu and I went to the temple to see what was the matter. Addressing the image, Mathur said bitterly : 'What a shame, Lord ! You are so worthless ! The thief took all the ornaments from Your body, and You couldn't do a thing about it.' Thereupon I said to Mathur : 'Shame on you ! How improper your words are ! To God, the jewels you talk so much about are only lumps of clay. Lakshmi, the Goddess of Fortune, is His Consort. Do you mean to say that He should spend sleepless nights because a thief has taken your few rupees ? You mustn't say such things.'

"Can one ever bring God under control through wealth ? He can be tamed only through love. What does He want ? Certainly not wealth ! He wants from His devotees love, devotion, feeling, discrimination, and renunciation.

"One looks on God exactly according to one's own inner feeling. Take, for instance, a devotee with an excess of tamas. He thinks that the Divine Mother eats goat. So he slaughters one for Her. Again, the devotee endowed with rajas cooks rice and various other dishes for the Mother. But the sattvic devotee doesn't make any outer show of his worship. People don't even know he is worshipping. If he has no flowers, he worships God with mere Ganges water and the leaves of the bel-tree. His food offering to the Deity consists of sweetened puffed rice or a few candies. Occasionally he cooks a little rice pudding for the Deity.

"There is also another class of devotees, those who are beyond the three gunas. They have the nature of a child. Their worship consists in chanting God's name—just His name.

(To Keshab, with a smile) "Why is it that you are ill ? There is a reason for it. Many spiritual feelings have passed through your body ; therefore it has fallen ill. At the time an emotion is aroused, one understands very little about it. The blow that it delivers to the body is felt only after a long while. I have seen big steamers going by on the Ganges, at the time hardly noticing their passing. But oh, my ! What a terrific noise is heard after a while, when the waves splash against the banks ! Perhaps a piece of the bank breaks loose and falls into the water.

"An elephant entering a hut creates havoc within and ultimately shakes it down. The elephant of divine emotion enters the hut of this body and shatters it to pieces.

"Do you know what actually happens ? When a house is on fire, at first a few things inside burn. Then comes the great commotion. Just so, the fire of Knowledge at first destroys such enemies of spiritual life as passion, anger, and so forth. Then comes the turn of ego. And lastly a violent commotion is seen in the physical frame.

"You may think that everything is going to be over. But God will not release you as long as the slightest trace of your illness is left. You simply

cannot leave the hospital if your name is registered there. As long as the illness is not perfectly cured, the doctor won't give you a permit to go. Why did you register your name in the hospital at all?" (*All laugh.*)

Keshab laughed again and again at the Master's allusion to the hospital. Then Sri Ramakrishna spoke of his own illness. (*To Keshab*) "Hriday used to say, 'Never before have I seen such ecstasy for God, and never before have I seen such illness.' I was then seriously ill with stubborn diarrhoea. It was as if millions of ants were gnawing at my brain. But all the same, spiritual talk went on day and night. Dr. Rama of Natagore was called in to see me. He found me discussing spiritual truth. 'What a madman!' he said. 'Nothing is left of him but a few bones, and still he is reasoning like that!'"

MASTER (*to Keshab*): "All depends on God's will."

O Mother, all is done after Thine own sweet will ;
Thou art in truth self-willed, Redeemer of mankind !
Thou workest Thine own work : men only call it theirs.

"In order to take full advantage of the dew, the gardener removes the soil from the Basra rose down to the very root. The plant thrives better on account of the moisture. Perhaps that is why you too are being shaken to the very root. (*Keshab and the Master laugh.*) It may be that you will do tremendous things when you come back."

"Whenever I hear that you are ill I become extremely restless. After hearing of your last illness I used to weep to the Divine Mother in the small hours of the morning. I prayed to Her, 'O Mother, if anything happens to Keshab, with whom, then, shall I talk in Calcutta?' Coming to Calcutta, I offered fruits and sweets to the Divine Mother with a prayer for your well-being."

The devotees were deeply touched to hear of Sri Ramakrishna's love for Keshab and his longing for the Brahmo leader.

MASTER : "But this time, to tell the truth, I didn't feel anxious to that extent. Only for two or three days did I feel a little worried."

Keshab's venerable mother came to the east door of the room, the same door through which Keshab had entered. Umanath said aloud to the Master, "Sir, here is mother saluting you."

Sri Ramakrishna smiled. Umanath said again, "Mother asks you to bless Keshab that he may be cured of his illness."

MASTER (*to Keshab's mother*): "Please pray to the Divine Mother, who is the Bestower of all bliss. She will take away your troubles."

(*To Keshab*) "Don't spend long hours in the inner apartments. You will sink down and down in the company of women. You will feel better if you hear only talk of God."

The Master uttered these words in a serious voice and then began to laugh like a boy. He said to Keshab, "Let me see your hand." He weighed it playfully, like a child. At last he said : "No, your hand is light. Hypocrites have heavy hands." (*All laugh.*)

Umanath again said to the Master from the door, "Mother asks you to bless Keshab."

MASTER (*gravely*) : "What can I do? God alone blesses all. 'Thou workest Thine own work; men only call it theirs.'

"God laughs on two occasions. He laughs when two brothers divide land between them. They put a string across the land and say to each other, 'This side is mine, and that side is yours.' God laughs and says to Himself, 'Why, this whole universe is Mine; and about a little clod they say, 'This side is mine, and that side is yours'!'

"God laughs again when the physician says to the mother weeping bitterly because of her child's desperate illness: 'Don't be afraid, mother, I shall cure your child.' The physician does not know that no one can save the child if God wills that he should die." (*All are silent.*)

Just then Keshab was seized with a fit of coughing, which lasted for a long time. The sight of his suffering made everyone sad. He became exhausted and could stay no longer. He bowed low before the Master and left the room, holding to the wall as before.

Some refreshments had been arranged for the Master. Keshab's eldest son was seated near him. Amrita introduced the boy and requested Sri Ramakrishna to bless him. The Master said, "It is not given to me to bless anyone." With a sweet smile he stroked the boy's body gently.

AMRITA (*with a smile*) : "All right, then do as you please."

MASTER (*to the devotees*) : "I cannot say such a thing as 'May you be healed.' I never ask the Divine Mother to give me the power of healing. I pray to Her only for pure love."

"Is Keshab a small person? He is respected by all, seekers after wealth as well as holy men. Once I visited Dayananda, who was then staying at a garden house. I saw he was extremely anxious about Keshab's coming; he went out every few minutes to see whether he had arrived. I learnt later on that Keshab had made an appointment with him that day. Keshab, I understood, had no faith in the sacrifices and the deities mentioned in the Vedas. Referring to this, Dayananda said: 'Why, the Lord has created so many things. Could He not make deities as well?'"

Continuing, the Master said: "Keshab is free from the pride of a small-minded religious teacher. To many people he has said, 'If you have any doubts, go there¹ to have them solved.' It is my way, too, to say: 'What shall I do with people's respect? Let Keshab's virtues increase a millionfold.' Keshab is certainly a great man. Everyone respects him, seekers after wealth as well as holy men." Thus did Sri Ramakrishna praise Keshab before the latter's disciples.

After partaking of the refreshments the Master was ready to leave. The Brahmo devotees accompanied him to the cab, which was standing in the street. While coming down the stairs the Master noticed that there was no light on the ground floor. He said to Amrita and Keshab's other disciples: "These places should be well lighted. A house without light becomes stricken with poverty. Please see that it doesn't happen again."

¹ To Sri Ramakrishna.

Then Sri Ramakrishna left for Dakshineswar with one or two devotees.

On his way to Dakshineswar from Keshab's cottage Sri Ramakrishna stopped at Jaygopal Sen's house. It was about seven o'clock in the evening. In the drawing-room Jaygopal's relatives and neighbours had gathered. Vaikuntha, Jaygopal's brother, said to the Master : "Sir, we are worldly people. Please give us some advice."

MASTER : "Do your duty to the world after knowing God. With one hand hold to the Lotus Feet of the Lord and with the other do your work."

VAIKUNTHA : "Is the world unreal ?"

MASTER : "Yes, it is unreal as long as one has not realized God. Through ignorance man forgets God and speaks always of 'I' and 'mine'. He sinks down and down, entangled in maya, deluded by 'woman and gold'. Maya robs him of his knowledge to such an extent that he cannot find the way of escape, though such a way exists."

"Listen to a song :

When such delusion veils the world, through Mahamaya's spell,
That Brahma is bereft of sense
And Vishnu loses consciousness,
What hope is left for men ?

"You all know from your experience how impermanent the world is. Look at it this way. How many people have come into the world and again passed away ! People are born and they die. This moment the world is and the next it is not. It is impermanent. Those you think to be your very own will not exist for you when you close your eyes in death. Again, you see people who have no immediate relatives, and yet for the sake of a grandson they will not go to Benares to lead a holy life. 'Oh, what will become of my Haru then ? ' they argue.

The narrow channel first is made, and there the trap is set ;
But open though the passage lies,
The fish, once safely through the gate,
Do not come out again.

Yet even though a way leads forth,
Encased within its own cocoon,
The worm remains to die.

This kind of world is illusory and impermanent."

A NEIGHBOUR : "Why, sir, should one hold to God with one hand and to the world with the other ? Why should one even stretch out one hand to hold to the world, if it is impermanent ? "

MASTER : "The world is not impermanent if one lives there after knowing God. Listen to another song :

O mind, you do not know how to farm !
Fallow lies the field of your life.
If you had only worked it well,
How rich a harvest you might reap !

• Hedge it about with Kali's name
 If you would keep your harvest safe ;
 This is the stoutest hedge of all,
 For Death himself cannot come near it.

" Did you listen to the song ?

Hedge it about with Kali's name
 If you would keep your harvest safe.

Surrender yourself to God and you will achieve everything.

This is the stoutest hedge of all,
 For death himself cannot come near it.

" Yes, it is a strong hedge indeed. If you but realize God, you won't see the world as unsubstantial. He who has realized God knows that God Himself has become the world and all living beings. When you feed your child, you should feel that you are feeding God. You should look on your father and mother as veritable manifestations of God and the Divine Mother, and serve them as such. If a man enters the world after realizing God, he does not generally keep up physical relations with his wife. Both of them are devotees ; they love to talk only of God and pass their time in spiritual conversation. They serve other devotees of God, for they know that God alone has become all living beings ; and, knowing this, they devote their lives to the service of others."

NEIGHBOUR : " But, sir, such a husband and wife are not to be found anywhere."

MASTER : " Yes, they can be found, though they may be very rare. Worldly people cannot recognize them. In order to lead such a life both husband and wife must be spiritual. It is possible to lead such a life if both of them have tasted the Bliss of God. God's special grace is necessary to create such a couple ; otherwise there will always be misunderstanding between them. In that case the one has to leave the other. Life becomes very miserable if husband and wife do not agree. The wife will say to her husband day and night : ' Why did my father marry me to such a person ? I can't get enough to eat or to feed my children. I haven't clothes enough to cover my body or to give to my children. I haven't received a single piece of jewelry from you. How happy you have made me ! Ah ! You keep your eyes closed and mutter the name of God ! Now do give up all these crazy ideas.' "

DEVOTEE : " There are such obstacles, certainly. Besides, the children may be disobedient. There is no end of difficulties. Now, sir, what is the way ?"

MASTER : " It is extremely difficult to practise spiritual discipline and at the same time lead a householder's life. There are many handicaps : disease, grief, poverty, misunderstanding with one's wife, and disobedient, stupid, and stubborn children. I don't have to give you a list of them.

" But still there is a way out. One should pray to God, going now and then into solitude, and make efforts to realize Him."

NEIGHBOUR : " Must one leave home then ?"

MASTER : "No, not altogether. Whenever you have leisure, go into solitude for a day or two. At that time don't have any relations with the outside world and don't hold any conversation with worldly people on worldly affairs. You must live either in solitude or in the company of holy men."

NEIGHBOUR : "How can one recognize a holy man?"

MASTER : "He who has surrendered his body, mind, and innermost self to God is surely a holy man. He who has renounced 'woman and gold' is surely a holy man. He is a holy man who does not regard woman with the eyes of a worldly person. He never forgets to look upon a woman as his mother, and to offer his worship if he happens to be near her. The holy man constantly thinks of God and does not indulge in any talk except about spiritual things. Furthermore, he serves all beings, knowing that God resides in everybody's heart. These, in general, are the signs of a holy man."

NEIGHBOUR : "Must one always live in solitude?"

MASTER : "Haven't you seen the trees on the foot-path along a street? They are fenced around as long as they are very young; otherwise cattle destroy them. But there is no longer any need of fences when their trunks grow thick and strong. Then they won't break even if an elephant is tied to them. Just so, there will be no need for you to worry and fear if you make your mind as strong as a thick tree-trunk. First of all try to acquire discrimination. Break the jack-fruit open only after you have rubbed your hands with oil; then its sticky milk won't smear them."

NEIGHBOUR : "What is discrimination?"

MASTER : "Discrimination is the reasoning by which one knows that God alone is real and all else is unreal. Real means eternal, and unreal means impermanent. He who has acquired discrimination knows that God is the only Substance and all else is non-existent. With the awakening of this spirit of discrimination a man wants to know God. On the contrary, if a man loves the unreal—such things as creature comforts, name, fame, and wealth—, then he doesn't want to know God, who is of the very nature of Reality. Through discrimination between the Real and the unreal one seeks to know God."

"Listen to a song :

Come, let us go for a walk, O mind, to Kali, the Wish-fulfilling Tree,

And there beneath It gather the four fruits of life.

Of your two wives, Dispassion and Worldliness,

Bring along Dispassion only, on your way to the Tree,

And ask her son Discrimination about the Truth. . . .

"By turning the mind within oneself one acquires discrimination, and through discrimination one thinks of Truth. Then the mind feels the desire to 'go for a walk to Kali, the Wish-fulfilling Tree.' Reaching that Tree, that is to say, going near to God, you can without any effort gather four fruits, namely, dharma, artha, kama, and moksha. Yes, after realizing God, one can also get, if one so desires, dharma, artha, and kama, which are necessary for leading the worldly life."

NEIGHBOUR : "Then why should one call the world maya?"

MASTER : "As long as one has not realized God, one should renounce the world, following the process of 'Neti, neti'. But he who has attained God knows that it is God who has become all this. Then he sees that God, maya, living beings, and the universe form one whole. God includes the universe and its living beings. Suppose you have separated the shell, flesh, and seeds of a bel-fruit and someone asks you the weight of the fruit. Will you leave aside the shell and the seeds, and weigh only the flesh? Not at all. To know the real weight of the fruit, you must weigh the whole of it—the shell, the flesh, and the seeds. Only then can you tell its real weight. The shell may be likened to the universe, and the seeds to living beings. While one is engaged in discrimination one says to oneself that the universe and the living beings are non-Self and unsubstantial. At that time one thinks of the flesh alone as the substance, and the shell and seeds as unsubstantial. But after discrimination is over, one feels that all three parts of the fruit together form a unity. Then one further realizes that the stuff that has produced the flesh of the fruit has also produced the shell and seeds. To know the real nature of the bel-fruit one must know all three."

"It is the process of evolution and involution. The world, after its dissolution, remains involved in God; and God, at the time of creation, evolves as the world. Butter goes with buttermilk, and buttermilk goes with butter. If there is a thing called buttermilk, then butter also exists; and if there is a thing called butter, then buttermilk also exists. If the Self exists, then the non-Self must also exist."

"The phenomenal world belongs to that very Reality to which the Absolute belongs; again, the Absolute belongs to that very Reality to which the phenomenal world belongs. He who is realized as God has also become the universe and its living beings. One who knows the Truth knows that it is He alone who has become father and mother, child and neighbour, man and animal, good and bad, holy and unholy, and so forth."

NEIGHBOUR : "Then is there no virtue and no sin?"

MASTER : "They both exist and do not exist. If God keeps the ego in a man, then He keeps in him the sense of differentiation and also the sense of virtue and sin. But in a rare few He completely effaces the ego, and these go beyond virtue and sin, good and bad. As long as a man has not realized God, he retains the sense of differentiation and the knowledge of good and bad. You may say: 'Virtue and sin are the same to me. I am doing only as God bids me.' But you know in your heart of hearts that those are mere words. No sooner do you commit an evil deed than you feel a palpitation in your heart. Even after God has been realized, He keeps in the mind of the devotee, if He so desires, the feeling of the 'servant ego'. In that state the devotee says, 'O God, Thou art the Master and I am Thy servant.' Such a devotee enjoys only spiritual talk and spiritual deeds. He does not enjoy the company of ungodly people. He does not care for any work that is not of a holy nature. So you see that God keeps the sense of differentiation even in such a devotee."

NEIGHBOUR : "You ask us, sir, to live in the world after knowing God. Can God really be known?"

MASTER : "God cannot be known by the sense-organs or by this mind ; but He can be known by the pure mind, the mind that is free from wordly desires."

NEIGHBOUR : "Who can know God ?"

MASTER : "Right. Who can really know Him ? But as for us, it is enough to know as much of Him as we need. What need have I of a whole well of water ? One jar is more than enough for me. An ant went to a sugar hill. Did it need the entire hill ? A grain or two of sugar was more than enough."

NEIGHBOUR : "Sir, we are like typhoid patients. How can we be satisfied with one jar of water ? We feel like knowing the whole of God."

MASTER : "That's true. But there is also medicine for typhoid."

NEIGHBOUR : "What is that medicine, sir ?"

MASTER : "The company of holy men, repeating the name of God and singing His glories, and unceasing prayer. I prayed to the Divine Mother : 'Mother, I don't seek knowledge. Here, take Thy knowledge, take Thy ignorance. Give me only pure love for Thy Lotus Feet.' I didn't ask for anything else.

"As is the disease, so must the remedy be. The Lord says in the *Gita* : 'O Arjuna, take refuge in Me. I shall deliver you from all sins.' Take shelter at His feet. He will give you right understanding. He will take entire responsibility for you. Then you will get rid of the typhoid. Can one ever know God with such a mind as this ? Can one pour four seers of milk into a one-seer pot ? Can we ever know God unless He lets us know Him ? Therefore I say, take shelter in God. Let Him do whatever He likes. He is self-willed. What power is there in a man ?"

XVI

WITH THE DEVOTEES AT DAKSHINESWAR (II)

Sunday, December 9, 1883

SRI RAMAKRISHNA was seated on the small couch in his room with Adhar, Manomohan, Rakhal, M., Harish, and other devotees. It was about two o'clock in the afternoon. The Master was describing to them the exalted state of Sri Chaitanya.

MASTER : "Chaitanya experienced three states of mind. First, the conscious state, when his mind dwelt on the gross and the subtle. Second, the semi-conscious state, when his mind entered the causal body and was absorbed in the bliss of divine intoxication. Third, the inmost state, when his mind was merged in the Great Cause."

"This agrees very well with the five koshas, or 'sheaths', described in the Vedanta. The gross body corresponds to the annamayakosha and the pranamayakosha, the subtle body to the manomayakosha and the vijnanamayakosha, and the causal body to the anandamayakosha. The Mahakarana, the Great Cause, is beyond the five sheaths. When Chaitanya's mind merged in That, he would go into samadhi. This is called the nirvikalpa or jada samadhi."

"While conscious of the outer world, Chaitanya sang the name of God; while in the state of partial consciousness, he danced with the devotees; and while in the inmost state of consciousness, he remained absorbed in samadhi."

M. (*to himself*) : "Is the Master hinting at the different states of his own mind? There is much similarity between Chaitanya and the Master."

MASTER : "Chaitanya was Divine Love incarnate. He came down to earth to teach people how to love God. One achieves everything when one loves God. There is no need of hathayoga."

A DEVOTEE : "Sir, what is hathayoga like?"

MASTER : "A man practising hathayoga dwells a great deal on his body. He washes his intestines by means of a bamboo tube through his anus. He draws ghee and milk through his sexual organ. He learns how to manipulate his tongue by performing exercises. He sits in a fixed posture and now and then levitates. All these are actions of prana. A magician was performing his feats when his tongue turned up and clove to the roof of his mouth. Immediately his body became motionless. People thought he was dead. He

was buried and remained many years in the grave. After a long time the grave somehow broke open. Suddenly the man regained consciousness of the world and cried out, 'Come delusion ! Come confusion !' (All laugh.) All these are actions of prana.

"The Vedantists do not accept hathayoga. There is also rajayoga. Rajayoga describes how to achieve union with God through the mind—by means of discrimination and bhakti. This yoga is good. Hathayoga is not good. The life of a man in the Kaliyuga is dependent on food."

Sri Ramakrishna was standing in the road by the side of the nahabat. He was on his way to his room, having come from the pine-grove. He saw M. seated on the verandah of the nahabat, behind the fence, absorbed in meditation.

MASTER : "Hello ! You are here ? You will get results very soon. If you practise a little, then someone will come forward to help you."

M. looked up at the Master, startled ; he remained sitting on the floor.

MASTER : "The time is ripe for you. The mother bird does not break the shell of the egg until the right time arrives. What I told you is indeed your Ideal."

Sri Ramakrishna again mentioned to M. his spiritual Ideal.

MASTER : "It is not necessary for all to practise great austerity. But I went through great suffering. I used to lie on the ground with my head resting on a mound for a pillow. I hardly noticed the passing of the days. I only called on God and wept, 'O Mother ! O Mother !'"

M. had been visiting Sri Ramakrishna for the past two years. Since he had been educated along English lines, he had acquired a fondness for Western philosophy and science, and had liked to hear Keshab and other scholars lecture. Sri Ramakrishna would address him now and then as the "Englishman". Since coming to Sri Ramakrishna, M. had lost all relish for lectures and for books written by English scholars. The only thing that appealed to him now was to see the Master day and night, and hear the words that fell from his blessed lips. M. constantly dwelt on certain of Sri Ramakrishna's sayings. The Master had said, "One can certainly see God through the practice of spiritual discipline", and again, "The vision of God is the only goal of human life."

MASTER (to M.) : "If you practise only a little, someone will come forward to tell you the right path. Observe the ekadasi.

"You are my very own, my relative ; otherwise, why should you come here so frequently ? While listening to the kirtan, I had a vision of Rakhal in the midst of Sri Krishna's companions in Vrindavan. Narendra belongs to a very high level. Hirananda¹ too ; how childlike his nature is ! What a sweet disposition he has ! I want to see him too.

"Once I saw the companions of Chaitanya ; not in a trance but with these very eyes. Formerly I was in such an exalted state of mind that I could

¹ Magicians, while performing their feats, cry in this way in order to cast a spell on the spectators.

² A devotee of the Master from Sindh.

see all these things with my naked eyes : but now I see them in samadhi. I saw the companions of Chaitanya with these naked eyes. I think I saw you there, and Balaram too. You must have noticed that when I see certain people I jump up with a start. Do you know why ? A man feels that way when he sees his own people after a long time.

"I used to pray to the Mother, crying : 'Mother, if I do not find the devotees I'll surely die. Please bring them to me immediately.' In those days whatever desire arose in my mind would come to pass. I planted a tulsi-grove in the Panchavati in order to practise japa and meditation. I wanted very much to fence it around with bamboo sticks. Soon afterwards a bundle of bamboo sticks and some string were carried by the flood-tide of the Ganges right in front of the Panchavati. A temple servant noticed them and joyfully told me,

"In that state of divine exaltation I could no longer perform the formal worship. 'Mother,' I said, 'who will look after me ? I haven't the power to take care of myself. I want to listen only to talk about Thee. I want to feed Thy devotees. I want to give a little help to those whom I chance to meet. How will all that be possible, Mother ? Give me a rich man to stand by me.' That is why Mathur Babu did so much to serve me.

"I said further : 'Certainly I shall not have any children, Mother. But it is my desire that a boy with sincere love for God should always remain with me. Give me such a boy.' That is the reason Rakhal came here. Those whom I think of as my own are part and parcel of me."

The Master started again for the Panchavati accompanied by M. No one else was with them. Sri Ramakrishna with a smile narrated to him various incidents of the past years of his life.

MASTER : "You see, one day I saw a strange figure covering the whole space from the Kali temple to the Panchavati. Do you believe this ?"

M. remained silent with wonder. He plucked one or two leaves from a branch in the Panchavati and put them in his pocket.

MASTER : "See there—that branch has been broken. I used to sit under it."

M : "I took a young twig from that tree—I have it at home."

MASTER (with a smile) : "Why ?"

M : "I feel happy when I look at it. After all this is over, this place will be considered very holy."

MASTER (smiling) : "What kind of holy place ? Like Panihati ?"

Almost every year, for some time past, the Master had been attending the religious festival at Panihati.

It was evening. Sri Ramakrishna was sitting on the small couch in his room, absorbed in meditation on the Divine Mother. The evening worship in the temples began, with the music of gong and conch-shell. M. was going to spend the night with the Master.

After a time Sri Ramakrishna asked M. to read from the *Bhaktamala*, a book about the Vaishnava saints.

M. read :

There was a king named Jayamal who loved Krishna with all his heart. He followed with unfailing devotion all the rites and ceremonies associated with the adoration of Krishna, whom he worshipped under the name of Syamalasundara. Completely satisfied with his own Ideal Deity, he never directed his attention to any other god or goddess. One of the inflexible rules of his devotions was to worship the Deity daily till almost midday. He would never deviate from this practice, even at the risk of his wealth or his kingdom. Learning this secret, an enemy king invaded the kingdom during the morning hours. Jayamal's soldiers could not fight without his command ; so they watched the invasion silently. Slowly the enemy surrounded the moat of the capital ; yet Jayamal did not come out of his shrine room. His mother came to him and wept bitterly, trying to persuade the king to fight. He said to her calmly : " Why are you worried ? Syamalasundara gave me this kingdom. What can I do if He has decided to take it away ? On the other hand, none will be able to do me harm if He protects me. Our own efforts are vain ! "

And actually, in the mean time, Syamalasundara, the Deity Himself, had taken the king's horse from the stable and had ridden fully armed to the field. Alone He faced the hostile king and alone destroyed his army. Having crushed the enemy forces, the Deity returned to the temple and fastened the horse near by.

Jayamal, on completing his worship, came out and discovered the horse there, panting and covered with sweat. " Who has been riding my horse ? " he demanded. " Who brought it to the temple ? " The officers declared they knew nothing about it. In a pensive mood the king proceeded to the battle-field with his army and there found the enemy, with the exception of their leader, lying dead. He was staring uncomprehendingly at the scene, when the enemy king approached, worshipped him, and said : " Please permit me to tell you something. How could I fight ? You have a warrior who could conquer the entire world. I do not want your wealth or your kingdom ; indeed, I will gladly give you my own, if you will tell me about that Blue Warrior, your friend. No sooner did I turn my eyes on him than he cast a spell on my heart and soul."

Jayamal then realized it had been none other than Syamalasundara that had appeared on the battle-field. The enemy king understood too. He worshipped Jayamal and through his blessings received Krishna's grace.

MASTER : " Do you believe all that ? Do you believe Krishna rode on that horse and killed Jayamal's enemies ? "

M : " I believe that Jayamal, Krishna's devotee, prayed to Him with a yearning heart. But I don't know whether the enemy really saw Him coming to the battle-field on a horse. Krishna might have come there riding the horse, but I do not know whether they really saw Him."

MASTER (with a smile) : " The book contains nice stories about devotees. But it is one-sided. Also, it abuses those who differ with its views."

The following morning the Master and M. were talking in the garden.

M : "Then I shall stay here."

MASTER : "Well, you all come here so often. What does it mean ? People visit a holy man once at the most. But you all come here so often. What is the significance of that ?"

M. remained silent. The Master himself gave the reply.

MASTER : "Could you come here unless you belonged to my inner circle ? That means you all are my own relatives, my own people—like father and son, brother and sister.

"I do not tell you everything. If I did, would you come here any more ?

"Once Sukadeva went to Janaka to be instructed in the Knowledge of Brahman. Janaka said, 'First give me my fee.' 'But', said Sukadeva, 'why should I give you the fee before receiving the instruction ?' Janaka laughed and said : 'Will you be conscious of guru and disciple after attaining Brahma-jnana ? That is why I asked you to give me the fee first.'

It was night. The moon rose, flooding all the quarters with its silvery light. M. was walking alone in the garden of the temple. On one side of the path stood the Panchavati, the bakul-grove, the nahabat, and the Master's room, and on the other side flowed the Ganges, reflecting millions of broken moons on its rippling surface.

M. said to himself : "Can one really see God ? The Master says it is possible. He says that, if one makes a little effort, then someone comes forward and shows the way. Well, I am married. I have children. Can one realize God in spite of all that ?"

M. reflected awhile and continued his soliloquy : "Surely one can. Otherwise, why should the Master say so ? Why shouldn't it be possible through the grace of God ?

"Here is the world around me—the sun, moon, stars, living beings, and the twenty-four cosmic principles. How did they come into existence ? Who is their Creator ? What am I to Him ? Life is indeed vain without this knowledge.

"Sri Ramakrishna is certainly the best of men. In all my life I have not seen another great soul like him. He must have seen God. Otherwise, how could he talk with God day and night, addressing Him so intimately as 'Mother' ? Otherwise, how could he love God so intimately ? Such is his love for God that he forgets the outer world. He goes into samadhi and remains like a lifeless thing. Again, in the ecstasy of that love, he laughs and cries and dances and sings."

Friday, December 14, 1883

At nine o'clock in the morning Sri Ramakrishna was standing on the southeast verandah near the door of his room, with Ramlal by his side. Rakhal and Latu were moving about. M. arrived and prostrated himself before the Master. Sri Ramakrishna said to him affectionately : "You have come. That's very good. Today is an auspicious day."

It was the last day of the Bengali month and the day of the full moon. M. was going to spend a few days with the Master practising spiritual discipline.

The Master had said to him, "If an aspirant practises a little spiritual discipline, then someone comes forward to help him."

The Master had said to M : " You should not eat every day at the guesthouse of the Kali temple. The guest-house is intended to supply free food to monks and the destitute. Bring your own cook with you." M. had accordingly done so. The Master arranged a place for the man to cook and he asked Ramlal to speak to the milkman about milk.

A little later Ramlal began to read from the *Adhyatma Ramayana*. The Master and M. listened while he read :

Rama had married Sita after breaking the great bow of Siva. On the way to Ayodhya with His bride, Rama was confronted by the warrior sage Parasurama, who was about to make trouble for Him. Parasurama threw a bow at Rama and challenged Him to string it. Dasaratha, Rama's father, was seized with fear. With a smile, Rama took the bow in His left hand and strung it. Then, twanging the bow-string, He fixed an arrow and asked Parasurama where to shoot it. That curbed the pride of the warrior sage. Prostrating himself before Rama, Parasurama worshipped Him as the Supreme Brahman.

As Sri Ramakrishna listened to Parasurama's hymn, he went into a spiritual mood and now and then chanted the name of Rama in his melodious voice.

Then the Master asked Ramlal to read about Guhaka. Ramlal read :

Guhaka, the pariah, was chief of the untouchables and an intimate friend of Rama. When Rama, Sita, and Lakshmana were starting into the forest to redeem Dasaratha's pledge, Guhaka ferried them across the river. Rama embraced Guhaka tenderly and told him He was going to spend fourteen years in exile, wearing the bark of trees and eating the herbs, fruits, and roots that grew in the woods. He promised to visit Guhaka again on His way back to Ayodhya after the period of exile was over. The pariah king waited patiently. But when the fourteenth year had run out and Rama had not returned, Guhaka lighted a funeral pyre. He was on the point of entering it when Hanuman arrived as Rama's messenger. In a celestial chariot Rama and Sita soon appeared, and Guhaka's joy was unbounded.

After the midday meal Sri Ramakrishna lay down on his bed to rest. M. was seated on the floor. Presently Dr. Shyama and a few devotees arrived. The Master sat up on the bed and began to converse with them.

MASTER : " It is by no means necessary for a man always to be engaged in his duties. Actions drop away when one realizes God, as the flower drops of itself when the fruit appears.

" He who has realized God no longer performs religious duties such as the sandhya. In his case the sandhya merges in the Gayatri. When that happens, it is enough for a person to repeat just the Gayatri mantra. Then the Gayatri merges in Om. After that one no longer chants even the Gayatri ; it is enough then to chant simply Om. How long should a man practise such devotions as the sandhya ? As long as he does not feel a thrill in his body and shed tears of joy while repeating the name of Rama or of Hari. People worship God to win money or a lawsuit. That is not good."

A DEVOTEE : " We find that everyone strives after money. Even Keshab Sen married his daughter to a prince."

MASTER : " Keshab's case is quite different. God provides everything for a genuine devotee, even without his making any effort. The son of a real king gets his monthly allowance. I am not talking of lawyers and men of that sort, who go through suffering in order to earn money, and who become slaves of others to that end. I am speaking of a real prince. A true devotee has no desire. He does not care for money. Money comes to him of itself. The *Gita* describes such a devotee as 'content with what comes to him without effort'. A good brahmin, without any personal motive, can accept food even from the house of an untouchable. He does not desire it ; it comes of its own accord."

A DEVOTEE : " Sir, how should one live in the world ? "

MASTER : " Live in the world as the mudfish lives in the mud. One develops love of God by going away from the world into solitude, now and then, and meditating on God. After that one can live in the world unattached. The mud is there, and the fish has to live in it, but his body is not stained by the mud. Such a man can lead the life of a householder in a spirit of detachment."

The Master noticed that M. was listening to his words with great attention.

MASTER (*looking at M.*) : " One can realize God if one feels intense dispassion for worldly things. A man with such dispassion feels that the world is like a forest on fire. He regards his wife and children as a deep well. If he really feels that kind of dispassion, he renounces home and family. It is not enough for him to live in the world in a spirit of detachment.

'Woman and gold' alone is maya. If maya is once recognized, it feels ashamed of itself and takes to flight. A man put on a tiger skin and tried to frighten another man. But the latter said : ' Ah ! I have recognized you ! You are our Hare. At that the man dressed in the skin went away smiling to frighten someone else.'

" All women are the embodiments of Sakti. It is the Primal Power that has become women and appears to us in the form of women. It is said in the *Adhyatma Ramayana* that Narada and others praised Rama, saying : ' O Rama, Thou alone art all that we see as male, and Sita, all that we see as female. Thou art Indra, and Sita is Indrani ; Thou art Siva and Sita is Sivani ; Thou art man, and Sita is woman. What more need I say ? Thou alone dost exist wherever there is a male, and Sita wherever there is a female.'

(*To the devotees*) " One cannot renounce by the mere wish. There are prarabdha karma—inherited tendencies—and the like. Once a yogi said to a king, ' Live with me in the forest and think of God.' The king replied : ' That I cannot very well do. I could live with you, but I still have the desire for enjoyment. If I live in this forest, perhaps I shall create a kingdom even here. I still have desires.'

" Natabar Panja used to look after his cows in this garden during his boyhood. He had many desires. Hence he has established a castor-oil factory

and earned a great deal of money. He has a prosperous castor-oil business at Alambazar.

"There is one sect that prescribes spiritual discipline in company with women. I was once taken to the women belonging to the Kartabhaja sect. They all sat around me. I addressed them as 'mother'. At that they whispered among themselves : 'He is still a pravartaka. He doesn't know the way.' According to that sect the pravartaka is the beginner. Then comes the sadhaka, the struggling aspirant, and last of all the siddha of the siddha, the supremely perfect. A woman walked over to Vaishnavcharan and sat near him. Asked about it, he answered, 'She feels just like a young girl.' One quickly strays from the religious path by looking on woman as wife. But to regard her as mother is a pure attitude."

Some of the devotees took leave of the Master, saying that they were going to visit the temple of Kali and several of the other temples.

M. went walking alone in the Panchavati and other places in the temple garden. He thought about the Master's assurance that God can be easily realized, and about his exhortation to lead a life of intense renunciation, and his saying that maya, when recognized, takes to flight.

At half past three in the afternoon M. again entered the Master's room and sat on the floor. A teacher from the Broughton Institution had come with several students to pay a visit to Sri Ramakrishna. They were conversing together. Now and then the teacher asked questions. The conversation was about the worship of images.

MASTER (*to the teacher*) : "What is wrong with image worship ? The Vedanta says that Brahman manifests Itself where there is 'Existence, Light, and Love'. Therefore nothing exists but Brahman.

"How long do small girls play with their dolls ? As long as they are not married and do not live with their husbands. After marriage they put the dolls away in a box. What further need is there of worshipping the image after the vision of God ? "

The Master glanced at M. and said : "One attains God when one feels yearning for Him. An intense restlessness is needed. Through it the whole mind goes to God.

"A man had a daughter who became a widow when she was very young. She had never known her husband. She noticed the husbands of other girls and said one day to her father, 'Where is my husband ?' The father replied : 'Govinda³ is your husband. He will come to you if you call Him.' At these words the girl went to her room, closed the door, and cried to Govinda, saying : 'O Govinda, come to me ! Show Yourself to me ! Why don't You come ?' God could not resist the girl's piteous cry and appeared before her.

"One must have childlike faith—and the intense yearning that a child feels to see its mother. That yearning is like the red sky in the east at dawn. After such a sky the sun must rise. Immediately after that yearning one sees God.

³A name of Krishna.

"Let me tell you the story of a boy named Jatila. He used to walk to school through the woods, and the journey frightened him. One day he told his mother of his fear. She replied : 'Why should you be afraid ? Call Madhusudana.' 'Mother,' asked the boy, 'who is Madhusudana ?' The mother said, 'He is your Elder Brother.' One day after this, when the boy again felt afraid in the woods, he cried out, 'O Brother Madhusudana !' But there was no response. He began to weep aloud : 'Where are You, Brother Madhusudana ? Come to me. I am afraid.' Then God could no longer stay away. He appeared before the boy and said : 'Here I am. Why are you frightened ?' And so saying He took the boy out of the woods and showed him the way to school. When He took leave of the boy, God said : 'I will come whenever you call Me. Do not be afraid.' One must have this faith of a child, this yearning.

"A brahmin used to worship his Family Deity daily with food offerings. One day he had to go away on business. As he was about to leave the house, he said to his young son : 'Give the offering to the Deity today. See that God is fed.' The boy offered food in the shrine, but the image remained silent on the altar. It would neither talk nor eat. The boy waited a long time, but still the image did not move. But the boy firmly believed that God would come down from His throne, sit on the floor, and partake of the food. Again and again he prayed to the Deity, saying : 'O Lord, come down and eat the food. It is already very late. I cannot sit here any longer.' But the image did not utter a word. The boy burst into tears and cried : 'O Lord, my father asked me to feed You. Why won't You come down ? Why won't You eat from my hands ?' The boy wept for some time with a longing soul. At last the Deity, smiling, came down from the altar and sat before the meal and ate it. After feeding the Deity, the boy came out of the shrine room. His relatives said : 'The worship is over. Now bring away the offering.' 'Yes,' said the boy, 'the worship is over. But God has eaten everything.' 'How is that ?' asked the relatives. The boy replied innocently, 'Why, God has eaten the food.' They entered the shrine and were speechless with wonder to see that the Deity had really eaten every bit of the offering."

Late in the afternoon Sri Ramakrishna was talking to M. They were standing on the south side of the nahabat. Since it was winter the Master was wrapped in his woolen shawl.

MASTER : "Where will you sleep ? In the hut in the Panchavati ?"

M : "Won't they let me have the room on the upper floor of the nahabat ?"

M selected the nahabat because he had a poetic temperament. From there he could see the sky, the Ganges, the moonlight, and the flowers in the garden.

MASTER : "Oh, they'll let you have it. But I suggested the Panchavati because so much contemplation and meditation have been practised¹ there and the name of God has been chanted there so often."

¹ A name of Krishna.

² During the period of his sadhana Sri Ramakrishna practised spiritual discipline in the hut in the Panchavati.

It was evening. Incense was burning in the Master's room. He was sitting on the small couch, absorbed in meditation. M. was sitting on the floor with Rakhal, Latu, and Ramlal.

The Master said to M., "The sum and substance of the whole thing is to cultivate devotion for God and love Him." At Sri Ramakrishna's request Ramlal sang a few songs, the Master himself singing the first line of each.

Ramlal sang :

Oh, what a vision I have beheld in Keshab Bharati's hut !
 Gora, in all his matchless grace,
 Shedding tears in a thousand streams !
 Like a mad elephant
 He dances in ecstasy and sings.
 Drunk with an overwhelming love. . . .

Then he sang :

Though I ^{am} never loath to grant salvation,
 I hesitate indeed to grant pure love.
 Whoever wins pure love surpasses all ;
 He is adored by men ;
 He triumphs over the three worlds. . . .

Sri Ramakrishna said to Ramlal, "Sing that one—'Gaur and Nitai, ye blessed brothers'." Ramlal began the song and the Master joined him :

Gaur and Nitai, ye blessed brothers !
 - I have heard how kind you are,
 And therefore I have come to you.
 When I visited Benares,
 Siva, Lord of Kasi, told me
 Of the Parabrahman's birth,
 As man, in Mother Sachi's home.
 O Brahman, Thee I recognize !
 Many a sadhu have I seen,
 But never one so kind as you.

Once at Braja you were born
 As Kanai and Balai, His brother ;
 - Now, once more, in Nadia,
 As Gaur and Nitai do you appear,
 Hiding the shapes that then you wore.
 In Braja's pastures running freely,
 Once you frolicked ; now, for play,
 You roll on the ground in Nadia,
 Chanting aloud Lord Hari's name.
 Laughing, shouting, once you played
 At Braja with your cowherd friends ;
 And now you chant Lord Hari's name.

O Gaur, how cleverly you hide
 The dark-blue form ['] you wore at Braja !
 But your slanting eyes betray you.

^{*} The song represents Sri Krishna's words.

['] An allusion to Krishna's dark-blue complexion ; Gauranga's complexion was golden.

• Through the blessing of your name
 The sinner is set free, they say ;
 And so my soul is filled with hope.
 Now with eager heart I hasten
 To your feet : Lord ! I implore you,
 Keep me safe within their shadow.

You redeemed Jagai and Madhai,
 Wretched sinners though they were ;
 I pray you, do the same for me.
 I have heard that you embrace
 All men as brothers, even the outcaste.
 Whispering in the ears of all
 Lord Hari's life-renewing name.

Late at night M. sat alone in the nahabat. The sky, the river, the garden, the steeples of the temples, the trees, and the Panchavati were flooded with moonlight. Deep silence reigned everywhere, broken only by the melodious murmuring of the Ganges. M. was meditating on Sri Ramakrishna.

At three o'clock in the morning M. left his seat. He proceeded toward the Panchavati as Sri Ramakrishna had suggested. He did not care for the nahabat any more and resolved to stay in the hut in the Panchavati.

Suddenly he heard a distant sound, as if someone were wailing piteously, "Oh, where art Thou, Brother Madhusudana ?" The light of the full moon streamed through the thick foliage of the Panchavati, and as he proceeded he saw at a distance one of the Master's disciples sitting alone in the grove, crying helplessly, "Oh, where art Thou, Brother Madhusudana ?"

Silently M. watched him.

Saturday, December 15, 1883

M. had been staying at Dakshineswar with Sri Ramakrishna. The Master was sitting in his room, listening to the life of Prahlada, which Ramlal was reading from the *Bhaktamala*. M. was sitting on the floor. Rakhal, Latu, and Harish were also in the room, and Hazra was on the verandah. While listening to the story of Prahlada's love for God, Sri Ramakrishna went into an ecstatic mood.

Hiranyakasipu, the king of the demons and father of Prahlada, had put his son to endless torture to divert the boy's mind from the love of God. But through divine grace all the king's attempts to kill Prahlada were ineffectual. At last God appeared, assuming the form of Nrisimha, the Man-lion, and killed Hiranyakasipu. The gods were frightened at the rage and roaring of the Man-lion and thought that the destruction of the world was imminent. They sent Prahlada to pacify the Deity. The boy sang a hymn to Him in words of love, and the Man-lion, moved by affection, licked Prahlada's body.

Still in an ecstatic mood, the Master said, "Ah ! Ah ! What love for the devotee !" The Master went into deep samadhi. He sat there motionless. A tear-drop could be seen at the corner of each of his eyes.

The Master came down to the plane of the sense world and spoke to M., expressing his abhorrence for those who, while practising spiritual discipline, enjoyed sex-life.

MASTER : "Aren't you ashamed of yourself ? You have children, and still you enjoy intercourse with your wife. Don't you hate yourself for thus leading an animal life ? Don't you hate yourself for dallying with a body which contains only blood, phlegm, filth, and excreta ? He who contemplates the Lotus Feet of God looks on even the most beautiful woman as mere ash from the cremation ground. To enjoy a body which will not last and which consists of such impure ingredients as intestines, bile, flesh, and bone ! Aren't you ashamed of yourself ?"

M. sat there silently, hanging his head in shame.

MASTER : "A man who has tasted even a drop of God's ecstatic love looks on 'woman and gold' as most insignificant. He who has tasted syrup made from sugar candy regards a drink made from treacle as a mere trifle. One gradually obtains that love for God if one but prays to Him with a yearning heart and always chants His name and glories."

The Master was in an ecstasy of love. He began to dance about the room and sing :

Who is singing Hari's name upon the sacred Ganges' bank ?
Is it Nitai that has come, the giver of heavenly love ? . . .

It was ten o'clock in the morning. Ramlal had finished the daily worship in the Kali temple. The Master went to the temple accompanied by M. Entering the shrine, the Master sat before the image. He offered a flower or two at the feet of the Divine Mother. Then he put a flower on his own head and began to meditate. He sang a song to the Divine Mother :

Thy name, I have heard, O Consort of Siva, is the destroyer of
our fear,
And so on Thee I cast my burden : Save me ! Save me, O kindly
Mother ! . . .

Sri Ramakrishna returned from the Kali temple and sat on the southeast verandah of his room. He ate some refreshments which had been offered at the temple, and the devotees also received a share.

Rakhal sat by the Master and read about Lord Erskine from *Self-Help by Smiles*.

MASTER (*to M.*) : "What does the book say ?"

M. : "It says that Lord Erskine performed his duty without desiring any result for himself. Disinterested duty."

MASTER : "That is very good. But the characteristic of a man of Perfect Knowledge is that he doesn't keep a single book with him. He carries all his Knowledge on the tip of his tongue. There's the instance of Sukadeva. Books—I mean the scriptures—contain a mixture of sand and sugar. The sadhu takes the sugar, leaving aside the sand. He takes only the essence."

Vaishnavcharan, the musician, arrived and sang a few devotional songs. M. spent the night in the nahabat.

Sunday, December 16, 1883

Sri Ramakrishna was seated with M. on the semicircular porch of his room at about ten o'clock in the morning. The fragrance of gardenias, jasmines, oleanders, roses, and other flowers filled the air. The Master was singing, looking at M. :

Thou must save me, sweetest Mother ! Unto Thee I come for refuge,
Helpless as a bird imprisoned in a cage.
I have done unnumbered wrongs, and aimlessly I roam about,
Misled by maya's spell, bereft of wisdom's light.
Comfortless as a mother cow whose calf has wandered far away.

MASTER : " But why ? Why should I live like a ' bird imprisoned in a cage ' ? Fie ! For shame ! "

As the Master said these words he went into an ecstatic mood. His body became motionless and his mind stopped functioning ; tears streamed down his cheeks. After a while he said, " O Mother, make me like Sita, completely forgetful of everything—body and limbs—, totally unconscious of hands, feet, and sense-organs—only the one thought in her mind, ' Where is Rama ? ' "

Was the Master inspired by the ideal of Sita to teach M. the yearning that a devotee should feel for God ? Sita's very life was centred in Rama. Completely absorbed in the thought of Rama, Sita forgot even the body, which is so dear to all.

At four o'clock in the afternoon Mr. Mukherji, a relative of Prankrishna, arrived in the company of a brahmin well versed in the scriptures.

MUKHERJI : " I am very happy to meet you, sir."

MASTER : " God dwells in all beings. He is the gold in all. In some places it is more clearly manifest than in others. God dwells in the worldly-minded, no doubt, but He is hidden there, like gold under deep layers of clay."

MUKHERJI : " Sir, what is the difference between worldly and other-worldly things ? "

MASTER : " While striving for the realization of God, the aspirant has to practise renunciation, applying the logic of ' Neti, neti '—' Not this, not this '. But after attaining the vision of God, he realizes that God alone has become all things.

" At one time Rama was overpowered by the spirit of renunciation. Dasaratha, worried at this, went to the sage Vasishtha and begged him to persuade Rama not to give up the world. The sage came to Rama and found him in a gloomy mood. The fire of intense renunciation had been raging in the Prince's mind. Vasishtha said : ' Rama, why should You renounce the world ? Is the world outside God ? Reason with me.' Rama realized that the world had evolved from the Supreme Brahman. So He said nothing.

" Buttermilk is made from the same substance as butter. One who realizes this knows that butter goes with buttermilk and buttermilk with butter. After separating the butter with great effort—that is to say, after attaining Brahmajnana—you will realize that as long as butter exists, buttermilk also must exist. Wherever there is butter there must be buttermilk as well. As

long as one feels that Brahman exists, one must also be aware that the universe, living beings, and the twenty-four cosmic principles exist as well.

"What Brahman is cannot be described in words. Everything has been polluted, like food that has touched the tongue—that is, everything has been described in words. But no one has been able to describe Brahman. It is therefore unpolluted. I said this to Vidyasagar and he was delighted.

"But the Knowledge of Brahman cannot be realized if the aspirant is worldly-minded even in the slightest degree. He succeeds in acquiring this Knowledge only when his mind is totally free from 'woman and gold'. Parvati once said to Her father, 'Father, seek the company of holy men if you want the Knowledge of Brahman.'"

Addressing Mr. Mukherji, Sri Ramakrishna said : "You are rich, and still you call on God. That is very good indeed. It is said in the *Gita* that those who fall from the path of yoga are born in their next birth as devotees of God in rich families."

Mr. Mukherji quoted the line from the *Gita*.

MASTER : "God, if He so desires, can keep a jnani in the world too. The world and all living beings have been created by His will. But He is self-willed."

MUKHERJI (*with a smile*) : "How can God have any will ? Does He lack anything ?"

MASTER (*with a smile*) : "What's wrong in that ? Water is water whether it is still or in waves. The snake is a snake whether it is coiled up motionless or wriggles along. A man is the same man whether sitting still or engaged in action.

"How can you eliminate from the Reality the universe and its living beings ? If you do that, It will lack Its full weight. You cannot find out the total weight of the betel-fruit if you eliminate the seeds and shell.

"Brahman is unattached. One finds good and bad smells in the air, but the air itself is untainted. Brahman and Sakti are identical. It is the Primordial Power that has become the world and all living beings."

MUKHERJI : "Why does one deviate from the path of yoga ?"

MASTER : "As the saying goes : 'In my mother's womb I was in a state of yoga ; coming into the world, I have eaten its clay. The midwife has cut one shackle, the navel cord ; but how shall I cut the shackle of maya ?'

"Maya is nothing but 'woman' and 'gold'. A man attains yoga when he has freed his mind from these two. The Self—the Supreme Self—is the magnet ; the individual self is the needle. The individual self experiences the state of yoga when it is attracted by the Supreme Self to Itself. But the magnet cannot attract the needle if the needle is covered with clay ; it can draw the needle only when the clay is removed. The clay of 'woman' and 'gold' must be removed."

MUKHERJI : "How can one remove it ?"

MASTER : "Weep for God with a longing heart. Tears shed for Him will wash away the clay. When you have thus freed yourself from impurity, you will be attracted by the magnet. Only then will you attain yoga."

MUKHERJI : " Priceless words ! "

MASTER : " If a man is able to weep for God, he will see Him. He will go into samadhi. Perfection in yoga is samadhi. A man achieves kumbhaka without any yogic exercise if he but weeps for God. The next stage is samadhi.

" There is another method—that of meditation. In the Sahasrara, Siva manifests Himself in a special manner. The aspirant should meditate on Him. The body is like a tray ; the mind and buddhi are like water. The Sun of Satchidananda is reflected in this water. Meditating on the reflected sun, one sees the Real Sun through the grace of God.

" But the worldly man must constantly live in the company of holy men. It is necessary for all, even for sannyasis. But it is especially necessary for the householder. His disease has become chronic because he has to live constantly in the midst of ' woman and gold '."

MUKHERJI : " Yes, sir. The disease has indeed become chronic."

MASTER : " Give God the power of attorney. Let Him do whatever He wants. Be like a kitten and cry to Him with a fervent heart. The mother cat puts the kitten wherever she wants to. The kitten doesn't know anything. It is left sometimes on the bed and sometimes near the hearth."

MUKHERJI : " It is good to read sacred books like the *Gita*."

MASTER : " But what will you gain by mere reading ? Some have heard of milk, some have seen it, and there are some, besides, who have drunk it. God can indeed be seen ; what is more, one can talk to Him.

" The first stage is that of the beginner. He studies and hears. Second is the stage of the struggling aspirant. He prays to God, meditates on Him, and sings His name and glories. The third stage is that of the perfect soul. He has seen God, realized Him directly and immediately in his inner Consciousness. Last is the stage of the supremely perfect, like Chaitanya. Such a devotee establishes a definite relationship with God, looking on Him as his Son or Beloved."

M., Rakhal, Jugin, Latu, and the other devotees were entranced by these words of divine realization.

Mr. Mukherji and his friend were taking leave of the Master. After saluting him, they stood up. The Master also stood up to show them courtesy.

MUKHERJI (*smiling*) : " That you should stand up or sit down ! "

MASTER (*smiling*) : " But what's the harm ? Water is water whether it is placid or in waves. I am like a cast-off leaf in the wind. The wind blows that leaf wherever it lists. I am the machine and God is its Operator."

Mr. Mukherji and his friend left the room. M. thought : " According to the Vedanta all is like a dream. Are all these—the ego, the universe, and the living beings—unreal then ? "

M. had studied a little of the Vedanta. He also had read the German philosophers, such as Kant and Hegel, whose writings are only a faint echo of the Vedanta. But Sri Ramakrishna did not arrive at his conclusions by reasoning, as do ordinary scholars. It was the Divine Mother of the Universe who revealed the Truth to him. These were the thoughts that passed through M.'s mind.

A little later Sri Ramakrishna and M. were conversing on the porch west of the Master's room. No one else was there. It was a late winter afternoon, and the sun had not yet gone below the horizon.

M : "Is the world unreal ?"

MASTER : "Why should it be unreal ? What you are asking is a matter for philosophical discussion."

"In the beginning, when a man reasons following the Vedantic method of 'Not this, not this', he realizes that Brahman is not the living beings, not the universe, not the twenty-four cosmic principles. All these things become like dreams to him. Then comes the affirmation of what has been denied, and he feels that God Himself has become the universe and all living beings.

"Suppose you are climbing to the roof by the stairs. As long as you are aware of the roof, you are also aware of the stairs. He who is aware of the high is also aware of the low. But after reaching the roof you realize that the stairs are made of the same materials—brick, lime, and brick-dust—as the roof.

"Further, I have given the illustration of the bel-fruit. Both changeability and unchangeability belong to one and the same Reality.

"The ego cannot be done away with. As long as 'I-consciousness' exists, living beings and the universe must also exist. After realizing God, one sees that it is He Himself who has become the universe and the living beings. But one cannot realize this by mere reasoning.

"Siva has two states of mind. First, the state of samadhi, when He is transfixed in the Great Yoga. He is then Atmarama, satisfied in the Self. Second, the state when He descends from samadhi and keeps a trace of ego. Then He dances about, chanting, 'Rama, Rama !'"

Did the Master describe Siva to hint at his own state of mind ?

It was evening. Sri Ramakrishna was meditating on the Divine Mother and chanting Her holy name. The devotees also went off to solitary places and meditated on their Chosen Ideals. Evening worship began at the temple garden in the shrines of Kali, Radha-Krishna, and Siva.

It was the second day of the dark fortnight of the moon. Soon the moon rose in the sky, bathing temples, trees, flowers, and the rippling surface of the Ganges in its light. The Master was sitting on the couch and M. on the floor. The conversation turned to the Vedanta.

MASTER (*to M.*) : "Why should the universe be unreal ? That is a speculation of the philosophers. After realizing God, one sees that it is God Himself who has become the universe and all living beings.

"The Divine Mother revealed to me in the Kali temple that it was She who had become everything. She showed me that everything was full of Consciousness. The Image was Consciousness, the altar was Consciousness, the water-vessels were Consciousness, the door-sill was Consciousness, the marble floor was Consciousness—all was Consciousness.

"I found everything inside the room soaked, as it were, in Bliss—the Bliss of Satchidananda. I saw a wicked man in front of the Kali temple ; but in him also I saw the Power of the Divine Mother vibrating.

"That was why I fed a cat with the food that was to be offered to the Divine Mother. I clearly perceived that the Divine Mother Herself had become everything—even the cat. The manager of the temple garden wrote to Mathur Babu saying that I was feeding the cat with the offering intended for the Divine Mother. But Mathur Babu had insight into the state of my mind. He wrote back to the manager : 'Let him do whatever he likes. You must not say anything to him.'

"After realizing God, one sees all this aright—that it is He who has become the universe, living beings, and the twenty-four cosmic principles. But what remains when God completely effaces the ego cannot be described in words. As Ramprasad said in one of his songs, 'Then alone will you know whether you are good or I am good !' I get into even that state now and then.

"A man sees a thing in one way through reasoning and in an altogether different way when God Himself shows it to him."

Monday, December 17, 1883

It was about eight o'clock in the morning. Sri Ramakrishna was in his room with M., when Dr. Madhu arrived and sat down beside the Master on the small couch. He was an elderly man and full of wit. He used to visit the Master when the latter felt indisposed.

MASTER : "The whole thing in a nutshell is that one must develop ecstatic love for Satchidananda. What kind of love ? How should one love God ? Gauri used to say that one must become like Sita to understand Rama ; like Bhagavati, the Divine Mother, to understand Bhagavan, Siva. One must practise austerity, as Bhagavati did, in order to attain Siva. One must cultivate the attitude of Prakriti in order to realize Purusha—the attitude of a friend, a handmaid, or a mother.

"I saw Sita in a vision. I found that her entire mind was concentrated on Rama. She was totally indifferent to everything—her hands, her feet, her clothes, her jewels. It seemed that Rama had filled every bit of her life and she could not remain alive without Rama."

M : "Yes, sir. She was mad with love for Rama." *

MASTER : "Mad ! That's the word. One must become mad with love in order to realize God. But that love is not possible if the mind dwells on 'woman and gold'. Sex-life with a woman ! What happiness is there in that ? The realization of God gives ten million times more happiness. Gauri used to say that when a man attains ecstatic love of God all the pores of the skin, even the roots of the hair, become like so many sexual organs, and in every pore the aspirant enjoys the happiness of communion with the Atman.

"One must call on God with a longing heart. One must learn from the guru how God can be realized. Only if the guru himself has attained Perfect Knowledge can he show the way.

"A man gets rid of all desires when he has Perfect Knowledge. He becomes like a child five years old. Sages like Dattatreya and Jadabharata had the nature of a child."

M : "One hears about them. But there were many others like them that the world doesn't hear about."

MASTER : "Yes. The jnani gets rid of all desire. If any is left, it does not hurt him. At the touch of the philosopher's stone the sword is transformed into gold. Then that sword cannot do any killing. Just so, the jnani keeps only a semblance of anger and passion. They are anger and passion only in name and cannot injure him."

M : "Yes, sir. The jnani goes beyond the three gunas, as you say. He is not under the control of any of the gunas—sattva, rajas, or tamas. All these three are so many robbers, as it were."

MASTER : "Yes, one must assimilate that."

M : "In this world there are perhaps not more than three or four men of Perfect Knowledge."

MASTER : "Why do you say that? One sees many holy men and sannyasis in the monasteries of upper India."

M : "Well, I too can become a sannyasi like one of those."

The Master fixed his gaze on M. and said, "By renouncing everything?"

M : "What can a man achieve unless he gets rid of maya? What will a man gain by merely being a sannyasi, if he cannot subdue maya?"

Both remained silent a few minutes.

M : "Sir, what is the nature of the divine love transcending the three gunas?"

MASTER : "Attaining that love, the devotee sees everything full of Spirit and Consciousness. To him 'Krishna is Consciousness, and His sacred Abode is also Consciousness'. The devotee, too, is Consciousness. Everything is Consciousness. Very few people attain such love."

DR. MADHU : "The love transcending the three gunas means, in other words, that the devotee is not under the control of any of the gunas."

MASTER (smiling) : "Yes, that's it. He becomes like a child five years old, not under the control of any of the gunas."

The Master was resting after his noon meal. Mani Mallick arrived and saluted him. Sri Ramakrishna remained lying on the couch and said a word or two to Mani.

MANI : "I hear you visited Keshab Sen."

MASTER : "Yes. How is he now?"

MANI : "He hasn't recovered to any extent from his illness."

MASTER : "I found him to be very rajasic. I had to wait a long time before I could see him."

The Master sat up on the couch and continued his conversation with the devotees.

MASTER (to M) : "I became mad for Rama. I used to walk about carrying an image of Ramlala^{*} given to me by a monk. I bathed it, fed it, and laid it down to sleep. I carried it wherever I went. I became mad for Ramlala."

* A brass image of the Boy Rama.



MAHENDRANATH GUPTA, OR M.

(The recorder of *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* in Bengali.)

"I am an insignificant person. But I live by the side of an ocean, and I keep with me a few pitchers of sea water. When a visitor comes, I entertain him with that. What else can I speak of but his words?"

—M.

XVII

M. AT DAKSHINESWAR (I)

Tuesday, December 18, 1883

SRI RAMAKRISHNA was seated in his room with his devotees. He spoke highly of Devendranath Tagore's love of God and renunciation, and then said, pointing to Rakhal and the other young devotees, "Devendra is a good man; but blessed indeed are those young aspirants who, like Sukadeva, practise renunciation from their very boyhood and think of God day and night without being involved in worldly life.

"The worldly man always has some desire or other, though at times he shows much devotion to God. Once Mathur Babu was entangled in a lawsuit. He said to me in the shrine of Kali, 'Sir, please offer this flower to the Divine Mother.' I offered it unsuspectingly, but he firmly believed that he would attain his objective if I offered the flower.

"What devotion Rati's mother had! How often she used to come here and how much she served me! She was a Vaishnava. One day she noticed that I ate the food offered at the Kali temple, and that stopped her coming. Her devotion to God was one-sided. It isn't possible to understand a person right away."

It was a winter morning, and the Master was sitting near the east door of his room, wrapped in his moleskin shawl. He looked at the sun and suddenly went into samadhi. His eyes stopped blinking and he lost all consciousness of the outer world. After a long time he came down to the plane of the sense world. Rakhal, Hazra, M., and other devotees were seated near him.

MASTER (*to Hazra*): "The state of samadhi is certainly inspired by love. Once, at Syambazar, they arranged a kirtan at Natavar Goswami's house. There I had a vision of Krishna and the gopis of Vrindavan. I felt that my subtle body was walking at Krishna's heels.

"I went into samadhi when similar devotional songs were sung at the Hari Sabha in Jorashanko in Calcutta. That day they feared I might give up the body."

After the Master had finished his bath, he again spoke of the ecstatic love of the gopis. He said to M. and the other devotees: "One should accept the fervent attachment of the gopis to their beloved Krishna. Sing songs like this:

Tell me, friend, how far is the grove
 Where Krishna, my Beloved, dwells ?
 His fragrance reaches me even here ;
 But I am tired and can walk no farther."

Again he sang :

I am not going home, O friend,
 For there it is hard for me to chant my Krishna's name. . . .

Sir Ramakrishna had vowed to offer green coconut and sugar to Siddhesvari, the Divine Mother, for Rakhal's welfare. He asked M. whether he would pay for the offerings.

That afternoon the Master, accompanied by M., Rakhal, and some other devotees, set out in a carriage for the temple of Siddhesvari in Calcutta. On the way the offerings were purchased. On reaching the temple, the Master asked the devotees to offer the fruit and sugar to the Divine Mother. They saw the priests and their friends playing cards in the temple. Sri Ramakrishna said : "To play cards in a temple ! One should think of God here."

From the temple the Master went to Jadu Mallick's house. Jadu was surrounded by his admirers, well-dressed dandies. He welcomed the Master.

MASTER (*with a smile*) : "Why do you keep so many clowns and flatterers with you ?"

JADU (*smiling*) : "That you may liberate them." (*Laughter.*)

MASTER : "Flatterers think that the rich man will loosen his purse-strings for them. But it is very difficult to get anything from him. Once a jackal saw a bullock and would not give up his company. The bullock roamed about and the jackal followed him. The jackal thought : 'There hang the bullock's testicles. Some time or other they will drop to the ground and I shall eat them.' When the bullock slept on the ground, the jackal lay down too, and when the bullock moved about, the jackal followed him. Many days passed in this way, but the bullock's testicles still clung to his body. The jackal went away disappointed. (*All laugh.*) That also happens to flatterers."

Jadu and his mother served refreshments to Sri Ramakrishna and the devotees.

Wednesday, December 19, 1883

It was nine o'clock in the morning. Sri Ramakrishna was talking to M. near the bel-tree at Dakshineswar. This tree, under which the Master had practised the most austere sadhana, stood in the northern end of the temple garden. Farther north ran a high wall, and just outside was the government magazine. West of the bel-tree was a row of tall pines that rustled in the wind. Below the trees flowed the Ganges, and to the south could be seen the sacred grove of the Panchavati. The dense trees and underbrush hid the temples. No noise of the outside world reached the bel-tree.

MASTER (*to M.*) : "But one cannot realize God without renouncing 'woman and gold'."

M : "Why? Did not Vasishtha say to Rama, 'O Rama, You may renounce the world if the world is outside God'?"

MASTER (*smiling*) : "He said that to Rama so that Rama might destroy Ravana. Rama accepted the life of a householder and married to fulfil that mission."

M. stood there like a log, stunned and speechless.

Sri Ramakrishna went to the Panchavati on his way back to his room. M. accompanied him. It was then about ten o'clock.

M : "Sir, is there no spiritual discipline leading to realization of the Impersonal God?"

MASTER : "Yes, there is. But the path is extremely difficult. After intense austerities the rishis of olden times realized God as their innermost consciousness and experienced the real nature of Brahman. But how hard they had to work! They went out of their dwellings in the early morning and all day practised austerities and meditation. Returning home at nightfall, they took a light supper of fruit and roots.

"But an aspirant cannot succeed in this form of spiritual discipline if his mind is stained with worldliness even in the slightest degree. The mind must withdraw totally from all objects of form, taste, smell, touch, and sound. Only thus does it become pure. The Pure Mind is the same as the Pure Atman. But such a mind must be altogether free from 'woman and gold'. When it becomes pure, one has another experience. One realizes : 'God alone is the Doer, and I am His instrument.' One does not feel oneself to be absolutely necessary to others either in their misery or in their happiness.

"Once a wicked man beat into unconsciousness a monk who lived in a monastery. On regaining consciousness he was asked by his friends, 'Who is feeding you milk?' The monk said, 'He who beat me is now feeding me.'"

M : "Yes, sir.. I know that story."

MASTER : "It is not enough to know it. One must assimilate its meaning. It is the thought of worldly objects that prevents the mind from going into samadhi. One becomes established in samadhi when one is completely rid of worldliness. It is possible for me to give up the body in samadhi; but I have a slight desire to enjoy the love of God and the company of His devotees. Therefore I pay a little attention to my body."

"There is another kind of samadhi, called unmana samadhi. One attains it by suddenly gathering the dispersed mind. You understand what that is, don't you?"

M : "Yes, sir."

MASTER : "Yes. It is the sudden withdrawal of the dispersed mind to the Ideal. But that samadhi does not last long. Worldly thoughts intrude and destroy it. The yogi slips down from his yoga."

"At Kamarupukur I have seen the mongoose living in its hole up in the wall. It feels snug there. Sometimes people tie a brick to its tail; then the pull of the brick makes it come out of its hole. Every time the mongoose tries to be comfortable inside the hole, it has to come out because of the pull of the

brick. Such is the effect of brooding on worldly objects that it makes the yogi stray from the path of yoga.

"Worldly people may now and then experience samadhi. The lotus blooms, no doubt, when the sun is up ; but its petals close again when the sun is covered by a cloud. Worldly thought is the cloud."

M : "Isn't it possible to develop both jnana and bhakti by the practice of spiritual discipline ?"

MASTER : "Through the path of bhakti a man may attain them both. If it is necessary, God gives him the Knowledge of Brahman. But a highly qualified aspirant may develop both jnana and bhakti at the same time. Such is the case with the Isvarakotis—Chaitanya for example. But the case of ordinary devotees is different.

"There are five kinds of light : the light of a lamp, the light of various kinds of fire, the light of the moon, the light of the sun, and lastly the combined light of the sun and the moon. Bhakti is the light of the moon, and jnana the light of the sun.

"Sometimes it is seen that the sun has hardly set when the moon rises in the sky. In an Incarnation of God one sees, at the same time, the sun of Knowledge and the moon of Love.

"Can everyone, by the mere wish, develop Knowledge and Love at the same time ? It depends on the person. One bamboo is more hollow than another. Is it possible for all to comprehend the nature of God ? Can a one-seer pot hold five seers of milk ?"

M : "But what about the grace of God ? Through His grace a camel can pass through the eye of a needle."

MASTER : "But is it possible to obtain God's grace just like that ? A beggar may get a penny, if he asks for it. But suppose he asks you right off for his train fare. How about that ?"

M. stood silent. The Master, too, remained silent. Suddenly he said : "Yes, it is true. Through the grace of God some may get both jnana and bhakti."

M. saluted the Master and went back to the bel-tree.

At midday, finding that M. had not yet returned, Sri Ramakrishna started toward the bel-tree ; but on reaching the Panchavati he met M. carrying his prayer carpet and water-jug. M. saluted the Master.

Sri Ramakrishna said to M. : "I was coming to look for you. Because of your delay I thought you might have scaled the wall and run away. I watched your eyes this morning and felt apprehensive lest you should go away like Narayan Shastri. Then I said to myself : 'No, he won't run away. He thinks a great deal before doing anything.'"

The same night the Master talked to M., Rakhal, Latu, Harish, and a few other devotees.

MASTER (*to M.*) : "Some people give a metaphysical interpretation of the Vrindavan episode of Sri Krishna's life. What do you say about it ?"

M : "There are various opinions. What if there are ? You have told us the story of Bhishmadeva's weeping, on his bed of arrows, because he could not understand anything of God's ways.

"Again, you have told us that Hanuman used to say : ' I don't know anything about the day of the week, the position of the stars, and so forth. I only meditate on Rama.'

"Further, you have said to us that in the last analysis there are two things only : Brahman and Its Power. You have also said that, after the attainment of Brahmajnana, a man realizes these two to be One, the One that has no two."

MASTER : "Yes, that is true. Your ideal is to reach the goal. You may reach it by going either through a thorny forest or along a good road.

"Diverse opinions certainly exist. Nangta used to say that the monks could not be feasted because of the diversity of their views. Once a feast was arranged for the sannyasis. Monks belonging to many sects were invited. Everyone claimed that his sect should be fed first, but no conclusion could be arrived at. At last they all went away and the food had to be given to the prostitutes."

M : "Totapuri was indeed a great soul."

MASTER : "But Hazra says he was an ordinary man. There's no use in discussing these things. Everyone says that his watch alone gives the correct time.

"You see, Narayan Shastri developed a spirit of intense renunciation. He was a great scholar. He gave up his wife and went away. A man attains yoga when he completely effaces 'woman and gold' from his mind. With some, the characteristics of the yogi are well marked.

"I shall have to tell you something of the six centres. The mind of the yogi passes through these, and he realizes God through His grace. Have you heard of the six centres ?"

M : "These are the 'seven planes' of the Vedanta."

MASTER : "Not the Vedanta, but the Vedas. Do you know what the six centres are like ? They are the 'lotuses' in the subtle body. The yogis see them. They are like the fruits and leaves of a wax tree."

M : "Yes, sir. The yogis can perceive them. I have read that there is a kind of glass through which a tiny object looks very big. Likewise, through yoga one can see those subtle lotuses."

Following Sri Ramakrishna's direction, M. spent the night in the hut at the Panchavati. In the early hours of the morning he was singing alone :

I am without the least benefit of prayer and austerity, O Lord !
I am the lowliest of the lowly ; make me pure with Thy hallowed touch.

One by one I pass my days in hope of reaching Thy Lotus Feet,
But Thee, alas, I have not found. . . .

Suddenly M. glanced toward the window and saw the Master standing there. Sri Ramakrishna's eyes became heavy with tears as M. sang the line :

I am the lowliest of the lowly ; make me pure with Thy hallowed touch,

M. sang again :

I shall put on the ochre robe and ear-rings made of conch-shell ;
Thus, in the garb of a yogini, from place to place I shall wander,
Till I have found my cruel Hari. . . .

M. saw that the Master was walking with Rakhal.

Friday, December 21, 1883

In the morning the Master and M. were conversing alone under the bel-tree. The Master told him many secrets of spiritual discipline, exhorting him to renounce "woman and gold". He further said that the mind at times becomes one's guru.

After his midday meal the Master went to the Panchavati wearing a beautiful yellow robe. Two or three Vaishnava monks were there, clad in the dress of their sect.

In the afternoon a monk belonging to the sect of Nanak arrived. He was a worshipper of the formless God. Sri Ramakrishna asked him to meditate as well on God with form. The Master said to him : "Dive deep ; one does not get the precious gems by merely floating on the surface. God is without form, no doubt ; but He also has form. By meditating on God with form one speedily acquires devotion ; then one can meditate on the formless God. It is like throwing a letter away, after learning its contents, and then setting out to follow its instructions."

Saturday, December 22, 1883

Rakhal, Harish, M., and Latu had been staying with Sri Ramakrishna at Dakshineswar. About nine o'clock in the morning the Master was sitting with them on the southeast verandah of his room, when Balaram's father and Devendra Ghosh of Syampukur arrived.

A DEVOTEE : "Sir, how does one obtain love for God ?"

MASTER : "Go forward. The king dwells beyond the seven gates. You can see him only after passing through all the gates."

"At the time of the installation of Annapurna at Chanak, I said to Dwarika Babu : 'Large fish live in the deep water of a big lake. Throw some spiced bait into the water ; then the fish will come, attracted by its smell ; now and then they will make the water splash. Devotion and ecstatic love are like the spiced bait.'

"God sports in the world as man. He incarnates Himself as man—as in the case of Krishna, Rama, and Chaitanya. Once I said to Keshab : 'The greatest manifestation of God is in man. There are small holes in the bank of a field, where crabs and fish accumulate in the rainy season. If you want to find them you must seek them in the holes. If you seek God, you must seek Him in the Incarnations.'

"The Divine Mother of the Universe manifests Herself through this three-and-a-half cubit man. There is a song that says :

" O Mother, what a machine is this that Thou hast made !
 What pranks Thou playest with this toy
 Three and a half cubits high ! . . .

" One needs spiritual practice in order to know God and recognize Divine Incarnations. Big fish live in the large lake, but to see them one must throw spiced bait in the water. There is butter in milk, but one must churn the milk to get it. There is oil in mustard-seed, but one must press the seed to extract the oil."

DEVOTEE : " Has God form, or is He formless ? "

MASTER : " Wait, wait ! First of all you must go to Calcutta ; then only will you know where the Maidan, the Asiatic Society, and the Bengal Bank are located. If you want to go to the brahmin quarter of Khardaha, you must first of all go to Khardaha.

" Why should it not be possible to practise the discipline of the formless God ? But it is very difficult to follow that path. One cannot follow it without renouncing ' woman and gold '. There must be complete renunciation, both inner and outer. You cannot succeed in this path if you have the slightest trace of worldliness.

" It is easy to worship God with form. But it is not as easy as all that.

" One should not discuss the discipline of the Impersonal God or the path of knowledge with a bhakta. Through great effort perhaps he is just cultivating a little devotion. You will injure it if you explain away everything as a mere dream.

" Kabir was a worshipper of the Impersonal God. He did not believe in Siva, Kali, or Krishna. He used to make fun of them and say that Kali lived on the offerings of rice and banana, and that Krishna danced like a monkey when the gopis clapped their hands. (*All laugh.*)

" One who worships God without form perhaps sees at first the deity with ten arms, then the deity with four arms, then the Baby Krishna with two arms. At last he sees the Indivisible Light and merges in It.

" It is said that sages like Dattatreya and Jadabharata did not return to the relative plane after having the vision of Brahman. According to some people, Sukadeva tasted only a drop of that Ocean of Brahman-Consciousness. He saw and heard the rumbling of the waves of that Ocean, but he did not dive into It.

" A brahmachari once said to me, ' One who goes beyond Kedar cannot keep his body alive.' Likewise, a man cannot preserve his body after attaining Brahmajnana.' The body drops off in twenty-one days.

" There was an infinite field beyond a high wall. Four friends tried to find out what was beyond the wall. Three of them, one after the other, climbed the wall, saw the field, burst into loud laughter, and dropped to the other side. These three could not give any information about the field. Only the fourth man came back and told people about it. He is like those who retain their

¹ In the case of an ordinary aspirant the body drops off after he attains the Knowledge of Brahman, but this is not so in the case of a Divine Incarnation, because He is born with a special mission to teach mankind.

bodies, even after attaining Brahmajnana, in order to teach others.¹ Divine Incarnations belong to this class.

"Parvati was born as the daughter of King Himalaya. After Her birth She revealed to the king Her various divine forms. The father said: 'Well, Daughter, You have shown me all these forms. That is nice. But You have another aspect, which is Brahman. Please show me that.' 'Father,' replied Parvati, 'if you seek the Knowledge of Brahman, then renounce the world and live in the company of holy men.' But King Himalaya insisted. Thereupon Parvati revealed Her Brahman-form, and immediately the king fell down unconscious.

"All that I have just said belongs to the realm of reasoning. Brahman alone is real and the world illusory—that is reasoning. And everything but Brahman is like a dream. But this is an extremely difficult path. To one who follows it even the divine play in the world becomes like a dream and appears unreal; his 'I' also vanishes. The followers of this path do not accept the Divine Incarnation. It is a very difficult path. The lovers of God should not hear much of such reasoning.

"That is why God incarnates Himself as man and teaches people the path of devotion. He exhorts people to cultivate self-surrender to God. Following the path of devotion, one realizes everything through His grace—both Knowledge and Supreme Wisdom.

"God sports in this world. He is under the control of His devotee. 'Syama, the Divine Mother, is Herself tied by the cord of the love of Her devotee.'

"Sometimes God becomes the magnet and the devotee the needle, and sometimes the devotee becomes the magnet and God the needle. The devotee attracts God to him. God is the Beloved of His devotee and is under his control.

"According to one school, the gopis of Vrindavan, like Yasoda, had believed in the formless God in their previous births; but they did not derive any satisfaction from this belief. That is why later on they enjoyed so much bliss in the company of Sri Krishna in the Vrindavan episode of His life. One day Krishna said to the gopis: 'Come along. I shall show you the Abode of the Eternal. Let us go to the Jamuna for a bath.' As they dived into the water of the river, they at once saw Goloka. Next they saw the Indivisible Light. Thereupon Yasoda exclaimed: 'O Krishna, we don't care for these things any more. We would like to see You in Your human form. I want to take You in my arms and feed You.'

"So the greatest manifestation of God is through His Incarnations. The devotee should worship and serve an Incarnation of God as long as He lives in a human body. 'At the break of day He disappears into the secret chamber of His House.'

"Not all, by any means, can recognize an Incarnation of God. Assuming a human body, the Incarnation falls a victim to disease, grief, hunger, thirst, and all such things, like ordinary mortals. Rama wept for Sita. 'Brahman weeps, entrapped in the snare of the five elements.'

"It is said in the Purana that God, in His Incarnation as the Sow, lived happily with His young ones even after the destruction of Hiranyaksha. As the Sow, He nursed them and forgot all about His abode in heaven. At last Siva killed the sow body with his trident, and God, laughing aloud, went to His own abode."

In the afternoon Bhavanath arrived. Rakhal, M., Harish, and other devotees were in the room.

MASTER (*to Bhavanath*) : "To love an Incarnation of God—that is enough. Ah, what ecstatic love the gopis had for Krishna !"

Sri Ramakrishna began to sing, assuming the attitude of the gopis :

O Krishna ! You are the Soul of my soul. . . .

Then he sang :

I am not going home, O friend,
For there it is hard for me to chant my Krishna's name. . . .

And again :

O Friend, that day I stood at my door as You were going
to the woods. . . .

Continuing, the Master said : "When Krishna suddenly disappeared in the act of dancing and playing with the gopis, they were beside themselves with grief. Looking at a tree, they said : 'O tree, you must be a great hermit. You must have seen Krishna. Otherwise, why do you stand there motionless, as if absorbed in samadhi ?' Looking at the earth covered with green grass, they said : 'O earth, you must have seen Krishna. Otherwise, why does your hair stand on end ? You must have enjoyed the thrill of His touch.' Looking at the madhavi creeper, they said, 'O madhavi, give us back our Madhava !' The gopis were intoxicated with ecstatic love for Krishna. Akrura came to Vrindavan to take Krishna and Balarama to Mathura. When they mounted the chariot, the gopis clung to the wheels. They would not let the chariot move."

Saying this, Sri Ramakrishna sang, assuming the attitude of Akrura :

Hold not, hold not the chariot's wheels !
Is it the wheels that make it move ?
The Mover of its wheels is Krishna,
By whose will the worlds are moved. . . .

MASTER : "'Is it the wheels that make it move ?' 'By whose will the worlds are moved.' 'The driver moves the chariot at his Master's bidding.' I feel deeply touched by these lines."

Sunday, December 23, 1883

At nine o'clock in the morning Sri Ramakrishna was seated on the south-west porch of his room, with Rakhal, Latu, M., Harish, and some other

² According to Hindu mythology, God incarnated Himself as a sow in order to save the world from the iniquities of the demon Hiranyaksha.

devotees. M. had now been nine days with the Master at Dakshineswar. Earlier in the morning Manomohan had arrived from Konnagar on his way to Calcutta. Hazra, too, was present.

A Vaishnava was singing. Referring to one of the songs, Sri Ramakrishna said : "I didn't enjoy that song very much. The songs of the earlier writers seem to me to have more of the right spirit. Once I sang for Nangta at the Panchavati : 'To arms ! To arms, O man ! Death storms your house in battle array.' I sang another : 'O Mother, I have no one else to blame : Alas ! I sink in the well these very hands have dug.'

"Nangta, the Vedantist, was a man of profound knowledge. The song moved him to tears though he didn't understand its meaning. Padmalochan also wept when I sang the songs of Ramprasad about the Divine Mother. And he was truly a great pundit."

After the midday meal Sri Ramakrishna rested a few minutes in his room. M. was sitting on the floor. The Master was delighted to hear the music that was being played in the nahabat. He then explained to M. that Brahman alone has become the universe and all living beings.

MASTER : "Referring to a certain place, someone once said to me : 'Nobody sings the name of God there. It has no holy atmosphere.' No sooner did he say this than I perceived that it was God alone who had become all living beings. They appeared as countless bubbles or reflections in the Ocean of Satchidananda.

"Again, I find sometimes that living beings are like so many pills made of Indivisible Consciousness. Once I was on my way to Burdwan from Kamarpukur. At one place I ran to the meadow to see how living beings are sustained. I saw ants crawling there. It appeared to me that every place was filled with Consciousness."

Hazra entered the room and sat on the floor.

MASTER : "Again, I perceive that living beings are like different flowers with various layers of petals. They are also revealed to me as bubbles, some big, some small."

While describing in this way the vision of different divine forms, the Master went into an ecstatic state and said, "I have become ! I am here !" Uttering these words he went into samadhi. His body was motionless. He remained in that state a long time and then gradually regained partial consciousness of the world. He began to laugh like a boy and pace the room. His eyes radiated bliss as if he had seen a wondrous vision. His gaze was not fixed on any particular object, and his face beamed with joy. Still pacing the room, the Master said : "I saw the paramahamsa who stayed under the banyan-tree walking thus with just such a smile. Am I too in that state of mind ?"

He sat on the small couch and engaged in conversation with the Divine Mother.

MASTER : "I don't even care to know. Mother, may I have pure love for Thy Lotus Feet !

(To M.) "One attains this state immediately after freeing oneself of all grief and desire.

(*To the Divine Mother*) "Mother, Thou hast done away with my worship. Please see, Mother, that I don't give up all desire. Mother, the paramahamsa is but a child. Doesn't a child need a mother? Therefore Thou art the Mother and I am the child. How can the child live without the Mother?"

Sri Ramakrishna was talking to the Divine Mother in a voice that would have melted even a stone. Again he addressed Her, saying : "Mere knowledge of Advaita! I spit on it! Thou dost exist as long as Thou dost keep the ego in me. The paramahamsa is but a child. Doesn't a child need a mother?"

M. sat there speechless and looked at the divine manifestation in the Master. He said to himself : "The Master is an ocean of mercy that knows no motive. He has kept himself in the state of a paramahamsa that he might, as teacher, awaken the spiritual consciousness of myself and other earnest souls."

M. further thought : "The Master says, 'Advaita—Chaitanya—Nityananda'; that is to say, through the knowledge of the Non-dual Brahman one attains Consciousness and enjoys Eternal Bliss. The Master has not only attained the knowledge of non-duality but is in a state of Eternal Bliss. He is always drunk with ecstatic love for the Mother of the Universe."

With folded hands Hazra looked at the Master and said every now and then : "How blessed you are! How blessed you are!"

MASTER (*to Hazra*) : "But you have hardly any faith; you simply live here to add to the play, like Jatila and Kutila."

In the afternoon M. paced the temple garden alone. He was deeply absorbed in the thought of the Master and was pondering the Master's words concerning the attainment of the exalted state of the paramahamsa, after the elimination of grief and desire. M. said to himself : "Who is this Sri Ramakrishna, acting as my teacher? Has God embodied Himself for our welfare? The Master himself says that no one but an incarnation can come down to the phenomenal plane from the state of nirvikalpa samadhi."

Monday, December 24, 1883

At eight o'clock in the morning Sri Ramakrishna and M. were talking together in the pine-grove at the northern end of the temple garden. This was the eleventh day of M.'s stay with the Master.

It was winter. The sun had just risen. The river was flowing north with the tide. Not far off could be seen the bel-tree where the Master had practised great spiritual austerities. Sri Ramakrishna faced the east as he talked to his disciple and told him about the Knowledge of Brahman.

MASTER : "The formless God is real, and equally real is God with form. Nangta used to instruct me about the nature of Satchidananda Brahman. He would say that It is like an infinite ocean—water everywhere, to the right, left, above, and below. Water enveloped in water. It is the Water of the Great Cause, motionless. Waves spring up when It becomes active. Its activities are creation, preservation, and destruction."

"Again, he used to say that Brahman is where reason comes to a stop. There is the instance of camphor. Nothing remains after it is burnt—not even a trace of ash.

"Brahman is beyond mind and speech. A salt doll entered the ocean to measure its depth; but it did not return to tell others how deep the ocean was. It melted in the ocean itself.

"The rishis once said to Rama : 'O Rama, sages like Bharadvaja may very well call you an Incarnation of God, but we cannot do that. We adore the Word-Brahman.³ We do not want the human form of God.' Rama smiled and went away, pleased with their adoration.

"But the Nitya and the Lila are the two aspects of the same Reality. As I have said before, it is like the roof and the steps leading to it. The Absolute plays in many ways: as Isvara, as the gods, as man, and as the universe. The Incarnation is the play of the Absolute as man. Do you know how the Absolute plays as man? It is like the rushing down of water from a big roof through a pipe; the power of Satchidananda—nay, Satchidananda itself—descends through the conduit of a human form as water descends through the pipe. Only twelve sages, Bharadvaja and the others, recognized Rama as an Incarnation of God. Not everyone can recognize an Incarnation.

"It is God alone who incarnates Himself as man to teach people the ways of love and knowledge. Well, what do you think of me?

"Once my father went to Gaya. There Raghuvir said to him in a dream, 'I shall be born as your son.' Thereupon my father said to Him : 'O Lord, I am a poor brahmin. How shall I be able to serve You?' 'Don't worry about it', Raghuvir replied. 'It will be taken care of.'

"My sister, Hriday's mother, used to worship my feet with flowers and sandal-paste. One day I placed my foot on her head and said to her, 'You will die in Benares.'

"Once Mathur Babu said to me : 'Father, there is nothing inside you but God. Your body is like an empty shell. It may look from outside like a pumpkin, but inside there is nothing—neither flesh nor seed. Once I saw you as someone moving with a veil on.'

(To M.) "I am shown everything beforehand. Once I saw Gauranga and his devotees singing kirtan in the Panchavati. I think I saw Balaram there and you too.

"I wanted to know the experiences of Gauranga and was shown them at Syambazar in our native district. A crowd gathered; they even climbed the trees and the walls; they stayed with me day and night. For seven days I had no privacy whatever. Thereupon I said to the Divine Mother, 'Mother, I have had enough of it.'

"I am at peace now. I shall have to be born once more. Therefore I am not giving all knowledge to my companions. (With a smile) Suppose I give you all knowledge; will you then come to me again so willingly?

³ Om, the symbol of Brahman.

"I recognized you on hearing you read the *Chaitanya Bhagavat*.¹ You are my own. The same substance, like father and son. All of you are coming here again. When you pull one part of the kalmi creeper, all the branches come toward you. You are all relatives—like brothers. Suppose Rakhal, Harish, and the others had gone to Puri, and you were there too. Would you live separately ?

"Before you came here, you didn't know who you were. Now you will know. It is God who, as the guru, makes one know.

"Nangta told the story of the tigress and the herd of goats. Once a tigress attacked a herd of goats. A hunter saw her from a distance and killed her. The tigress was pregnant and gave birth to a cub as she expired. The cub began to grow in the company of the goats. At first it was nursed by the she-goats, and later on, as it grew bigger, it began to eat grass and bleat like the goats. Gradually the cub became a big tiger; but still it ate grass and bleated. When attacked by other animals, it would run away, like the goats. One day a fierce-looking tiger attacked the herd. It was amazed to see a tiger in the herd eating grass and running away with the goats at its approach. It left the goats and caught hold of the grass-eating tiger, which began to bleat and tried to run away. But the fierce tiger dragged it to the water and said : 'Now look at your face in the water. You see, you have the pot-face of a tiger; it is exactly like mine.' Next it pressed a piece of meat into its mouth. At first the grass-eating tiger refused to eat the meat. Then it got the taste of the meat and relished it. At last the fierce tiger said to the grass-eater : 'What a disgrace ! You lived with the goats and ate grass like them !' And the other was really ashamed of itself.

"Eating grass is like enjoying 'woman and gold'. To bleat and run away like a goat is to behave like an ordinary man. Going away with the new tiger is like taking shelter with the guru, who awakens one's spiritual consciousness, and recognizing him alone as one's relative. To see one's face rightly is to know one's real Self."

Sri Ramakrishna stood up. There was silence all around, disturbed only by the gentle rustling of the pine-needles and the murmuring of the Ganges. The Master went to the Panchavati and then to his room, talking all the while with M. The disciple followed him, fascinated. At the Panchavati Sri Ramakrishna touched with his forehead the raised platform around the banyan-tree. This was the place of his intense spiritual discipline, where he had wept bitterly for the vision of the Divine Mother, where he had held intimate communion with Her, and where he had seen many divine forms.

The Master and M. passed the cluster of bakul-trees and came to the nahabat. Hazra was there. The Master said to him : "Don't eat too much, and give up this craze for outer cleanliness. People with a craze do not attain Knowledge. Follow conventions only as much as necessary. Don't go to excess." The Master entered his room and sat on the couch.

Sri Ramakrishna was resting after his midday meal when Surendra, Ram, and other devotees arrived from Calcutta. It was about one o'clock. While

¹ A life of Chaitanya.

M. was strolling alone under the pine-trees. Harish came there and told him that the Master wanted him in his room. Someone was going to read from the *Siva Samhita*, a book containing instructions about yoga and the six centres.

M. entered the room and saluted the Master. The devotees were seated on the floor, but no one was reading the book. Sri Ramakrishna was talking to the devotees.

MASTER : "The gopis cherished ecstatic love for Krishna. There are two elements in such love : 'I-ness' and 'my-ness'. 'I-ness' is the feeling that Krishna will be ill if 'I' do not serve Him. In this attitude the devotee does not look upon his Ideal as God."

"'My-ness' is to feel that the Beloved is 'my' own. The gopis had such a feeling of 'my-ness' toward Krishna that they would place their subtle bodies under His feet lest His soles should get hurt.

"Yasoda remarked : 'I don't understand your Chintamani Krishna. To me He is simply Gopala.' The gopis also said : 'Oh, where is Krishna, our Beloved ? Where is Krishna, our Sweetheart ?' They were not conscious of His being God.

"It is like a small child saying 'my daddy'. If someone says to the child, 'No, he is not your daddy', the child says, 'Yes, he is my daddy.'

"God, incarnating Himself as man, behaves exactly like a man. That is why it is difficult to recognize an Incarnation. When God becomes man, He is exactly like man. He has the same hunger, thirst, disease, grief, and sometimes even fear. Rama was stricken with grief for Sita. Krishna carried on His head the shoes and wooden stool of His father Nanda.

"In the theatre, when an actor comes on the stage in the role of a holy man, he behaves like one, and not like the actor who is taking the part of the king. He plays his own role.

"Once an impersonator dressed himself as a world-renouncing monk. Pleased with the correctness of his disguise, some rich people offered him a rupee. He did not accept the money but went away shaking his head. Afterwards he removed his disguise and appeared in his usual dress. Then he said to the rich people, 'Please give me the rupee.' They replied : 'Why, you went away refusing our present. Why do you ask for it now ?' The man said : 'But then I was in the role of a holy man. I could not accept money.' Likewise, when God becomes man He behaves exactly like a man.

"At Vrindavan one sees many places associated with Krishna's life."

SURENDRA : "We were there during the holidays. Visitors were continually pestered for money. The priests and others asked for it continually. We told them that we were going to leave for Calcutta the next day, but we fled from Vrindavan that very night."

MASTER : "What is that ? Shame ! You said you would leave the place the next day and ran away that very day. What a shame !"

SURENDRA (*embarrassed*) : "Here and there we saw the babajis in the woods practising spiritual discipline in solitude."

MASTER : "Did you give them anything ?"

SURENDRA : "No, sir."

MASTER : " That was not proper of you. One should give something to monks and devotees. Those who have the means should help such persons when they meet them.

" I went to Vrindavan with Mathur Babu. The moment I came to the Dhruva Ghat⁵ at Mathura, in a flash I saw Vasudeva crossing the Jamuna with Krishna in his arms.

" One evening I was taking a stroll on the beach of the river. There were small thatched huts on the beach and big plum-trees. It was the 'cow-dust' hour. The cows were returning from the pasture, raising dust with their hoofs. I saw them fording the river. Then came some cowherd boys crossing the river with their cows. No sooner did I behold this scene than I cried out, 'O Krishna, where are you ? ' and became unconscious.

" I wanted to visit Syamakunda and Radhakunda ; so Mathur Babu sent me there in a palanquin. We had a long way to go. Food was put in the palanquin. While going over the meadow I was overpowered with emotion and wept : ' O Krishna, I find everything the same ; only You are not here. This is the very meadow where You tended the cows.' Hriday followed me on foot. I was bathed in tears. I couldn't ask the bearers to stop the palanquin.

" At Syamakunda and Radhakunda I saw the holy men living in small mud huts. Facing away from the road lest their eyes should fall on men, they were engaged in spiritual discipline. One should visit the ' Twelve Grove '.

" I went into samadhi at the sight of the image of Bankuvihari. In that state I wanted to touch it. I did not want to visit Govindaji twice. At Mathura I dreamt of Krishna as the cowherd boy. Hriday and Mathur Babu had the same dream.

(To Surendra) " You have both—yoga and bhoga. There are different classes of sages : the brahmarshi, the devarshi, and the rajarshi. Sukadeva is an example of the brahmarsi. He didn't keep even one book with him. An example of the devarshi is Narada. Janaka was a rajarshi, devoted to selfless work.

" The devotee of the Divine Mother attains dharma and moksha. He enjoys artha and kama as well. Once I saw you in a vision as the child of the Divine Mother. You have both—yoga and bhoga ; otherwise your countenance would look dry.

" The man who renounces all looks dry. Once I saw a devotee of the Divine Mother at the bathing-ghat on the Ganges. He was eating his meal and at the same time worshipping the Mother. He looked on himself as the Mother's child.

" But it isn't good to have much money. I find that Jadu Mallick is drowned in worldliness. It is because he has too much money. Nabin Niyogi, too, has both yoga and bhoga. I saw him and his son waving the fan before the image of the Divine Mother at the time of the Durga Puja."

SURENDRA : " Sir, why can't I meditate ? "

MASTER : " You remember God and think of Him, don't you ? "

⁵ A bathing-place in the Jamuna, where, according to tradition, Vasudeva, the father of Krishna, crossed the river carrying the new-born child through a stormy night.

SURENDRA : " Yes, Sir. I go to sleep repeating the word ' Mother '."

MASTER : " That is very good. It will be enough if you remember God and think of Him."

Sri Ramakrishna had taken Surendra's responsibilities on himself. Why should Surendra worry about anything ?

It was evening. The Master was sitting on the floor of his room with the devotees. He was talking to them about yoga and the six centres. These are described in the *Siva Samhita*.

MASTER : " Ida, Pingala, and Sushumna are the three principal nerves. All the lotuses are located in the Sushumna. They are formed of Consciousness, like a tree made of wax—the branches, twigs, fruits, and so forth all of wax. The Kundalini lies in the lotus of the Muladhara. That lotus has fourteen petals. The Primordial Energy resides in all bodies as the Kundalini. She is like a sleeping snake coiled up—' of the form of a sleeping snake, having the Muladhara for Her abode '. (To M.) The Kundalini is speedily awakened if one follows the path of bhakti. God cannot be seen unless She is awakened. Sing earnestly and secretly in solitude :

Waken, O Mother ! O Kundalini, whose nature is Bliss Eternal !
Thou art the serpent coiled in sleep, in the lotus of the Muladhara.

" Ramprasad achieved perfection through singing. One obtains the vision of God if one sings with yearning heart."

M : " Grief and distress of mind disappear if one has these experiences but once."

MASTER : " That is true. Distress of mind disappears for ever. I shall tell you a few things about yoga. But you see, the mother bird doesn't break the shell until the chick inside the egg is matured. The egg is hatched in the fullness of time. It is necessary to practise some spiritual discipline. The guru no doubt does everything for the disciple ; but at the end he makes the disciple work a little himself. When cutting down a big tree, a man cuts almost through the trunk ; then he stands aside for a moment, and the tree falls down with a crash.

" The farmer brings water to his field through a canal from the river. He stands aside when only a little digging remains to be done to connect the field with the water. Then the earth becomes soaked and falls of itself, and the water of the river pours into the canal in torrents.

" A man is able to see God as soon as he gets rid of ego and other limitations. He sees God as soon as he is free from such feelings as ' I am a scholar ', ' I am the son of such and such a person ', ' I am wealthy ', ' I am honourable ', and so forth.

" God alone is real and all else unreal ; the world is illusory—that is discrimination. One cannot assimilate spiritual instruction without discrimination.

" Through the practice of spiritual discipline one attains perfection, by the grace of God. But one must also labour a little. Then one sees God and enjoys bliss. If a man hears that a jar filled with gold is buried at a certain

place, he rushes there and begins to dig. He sweats as he goes on digging. After much digging he feels the spade strike something. Then he throws away the spade and looks for the jar. At the sight of the jar he dances for joy. Then he takes up the jar and pours out the gold coins. He takes them into his hand, counts them, and feels the ecstasy of joy. Vision—touch—enjoyment. Isn't it so ? "

M : " Yes, sir."

The Master was silent a moment and then went on.

MASTER : " Those who are my own will come here even if I scold them. Look at Narendra's nature ! At first he used to abuse my Mother Kali very much. One day I said to him sharply, ' Rascal ! Don't come here any more.' He slowly left the room and prepared a smoke. He who is one's own will not be angry even if scolded. What do you say ? "

M : " That is true, sir."

MASTER : " Narendra is perfect from his very birth. He is devoted to the ideal of the formless God."

M. (smiling) : " Whenever he comes here he brings along great excitement."

Sri Ramakrishna smiled and said, " Yes, excitement indeed."

The following day was Tuesday, the ekadasi day of the lunar fortnight. It was eleven o'clock in the morning and the Master had not yet taken his meal. M., Rakhal, and other devotees were sitting in the Master's room.

MASTER (to M.) : " One should fast on the eleventh day of the lunar fortnight. That purifies the mind and helps one to develop love of God. Isn't that so ? "

M : " Yes, sir."

MASTER : " But you may take milk and puffed rice. Don't you think so ?

XVIII

M. AT DAKSHINESWAR (II)

December 26, 1883

SRI RAMAKRISHNA, accompanied by Manilal Mallick, M., and several other devotees, was in a carriage on his way to Ram's new garden. The garden, which Ram had recently purchased, was next to Surendra's. Ram adored the Master as an Incarnation of God. He visited Sri Ramakrishna frequently at Dakshineswar. Manilal Mallick was a member of the Brahmo Samaj. The Brahmos do not believe in Divine Incarnations.

MASTER (*to Manilal*) : "In order to meditate on God, one should try at first to think of Him as free from upadhis, limitations. God is beyond upadhis. He is beyond speech and mind. But it is very difficult to achieve perfection in this form of meditation.

"But it is easy to meditate on an Incarnation—God born as man. Yes, God in man. The body is a mere covering. It is like a lantern with a light burning inside, or like a glass case in which one sees precious things."

Arriving at the garden, the Master got out of the carriage and accompanied Ram and the other devotees to the sacred tulsi-grove. Standing near it, he said : "How nice ! It is a fine place. You can easily meditate on God here."

Sri Ramakrishna sat down in the house, which stood to the south of the lake. Ram offered him a plate of fruit and sweets which he enjoyed with the devotees. After a short time he went around the garden.

Next Sri Ramakrishna proceeded toward Surendra's garden. He walked on foot a little distance and saw a sadhu sitting on a couch under a tree. At once he went up to the holy man and joyfully began a conversation with him.

MASTER : "To which order of monks do you belong ? Have you any title—Giri, Puri, or the like ?"

SADHU : "People call me a paramahamsa."

MASTER : "That is good. 'I am Siva'—that is a good attitude. But I must tell you something else. The process of creation, preservation, and destruction that is going on day and night is due to Sakti, the Power of God. This Primal Power and Brahman are one and the same. Sakti cannot exist without Brahman, just as waves cannot exist without water. There cannot be any instrumental music without an instrument."



A VIEW OF DAKSHINESWAR TEMPLE-GARDEN FROM THE GANGES

"As long as God keeps us in His relative world, so long we feel that there are two. If one accepts Sakti, one accepts Brahman as well. If one is aware of night, one is also aware of day. If one is aware of knowledge, one is also aware of ignorance.

"But there is another state in which God reveals to His devotee that Brahman is beyond both knowledge and ignorance. It cannot be described in words. What exists, exists."

After a pleasant conversation with the Sadhu, the Master returned to the carriage, the holy man walking with him. Sri Ramakrishna looked upon him as a friend of long acquaintance, and they walked arm in arm.

The Master arrived at Surendra's garden. The very first thing he talked about was the sadhu.

MASTER : "He is a very nice man. (*To Ram*) Bring him to Dakshineswar when you come. He is really a good man. There is a line in a song to the effect that a man cannot recognize a holy person unless he is holy himself.

"The sadhu believes in God without form. That is good. God is both formless and endowed with form. He is many things more. The Absolute and the Relative belong to one and the same Reality. What is beyond speech and mind is born in the flesh, assuming various forms and engaging in various activities. From that one Om have sprung 'Om Siva', 'Om Kali', and 'Om Krishna'. Suppose the master of a house has sent out a small boy of the family to invite people to a feast. All look on the boy with great fondness and affection because he is the son or grandson of a prominent man."

The Master took refreshments at Surendra's garden house and then set out for Dakshineswar with the devotees.

Thursday, December 27, 1883

The temple garden was filled with the sweet music of the dawn service, which mingled with the morning melody from the nahabat. Leaving his bed, Sri Ramakrishna chanted the names of God in sweet tones. Then he bowed before the pictures of the different deities in his room and went to the west porch to salute the Ganges.

Some of the devotees who had spent the night at the temple garden came to the Master's room and bowed before him. Rakhal was staying with the Master, and Baburam had come the previous evening. M. had been staying there two weeks.

Sri Ramakrishna said to M. : "I have been invited to Ishan's this morning. Baburam will accompany me, and you too." M. made ready to go with the Master.

At eight o'clock the carriage hired for the Master stood waiting in front of the nahabat. On all sides plants and trees were in flower, and the river sparkled in the sunlight of the bright winter's day. The Master bowed once more before the pictures. Then, still chanting the name of the Divine Mother, he got into the carriage, followed by M. and Baburam. The devotees took with them Sri Ramakrishna's woolen shawl, woolen cap, and small bag of spices,

Sri Ramakrishna was very happy during the trip and enjoyed it like a child. About nine o'clock the carriage stopped at the door of Ishan's house.

Ishan and his relatives greeted the Master and led him to the parlour on the first floor. Shrish, Ishan's son, was introduced to Sri Ramakrishna. The young man practised law at Alipur. He had been a brilliant student, having stood first in two of the university examinations, but he was extremely modest.

MASTER (*to Shrish*) : "What is your profession ?"

SHRISH : "I am practising law at Alipur."

MASTER (*to M.*) : "For such a man to be a lawyer ! (*To Shrish*) Well, have you any questions to ask ? Perhaps you want to know how to live unattached in the world. Isn't that so ?"

SHRISH : "Under the pressure of duties people do many unrighteous things in the world. Further, some are engaged in good work, and some in evil. Is this due to their actions in previous births ? Is that why they act this way ?"

MASTER : "How long should a man perform his duties ? As long as he has not attained God. Duties drop away after the realization of God. Then one goes beyond good and evil. The flower drops off as soon as the fruit appears. The flower serves the purpose of begetting the fruit."

"How long should a devotee perform daily devotions such as the sandhya ? As long as his hair does not stand on end and his eyes do not shed tears at the name of God. These things indicate that the devotee has realized God. From these one knows that he has attained pure love of God. Realizing God one goes beyond virtue and vice."

I bow my head, says Prasad, before desire and liberation ;
Knowing the secret that Kali is one with the highest Brahman,
I have discarded, once for all, both righteousness and sin.

"The more you advance toward God, the less He will give you worldly duties to perform."

SHRISH : "It is extremely difficult to proceed toward God while leading the life of a householder."

MASTER : "Why so ? What about the *yoga* of practice ? At Kamarapur I have seen the women of the carpenter families selling flattened rice. Let me tell you how alert they are while doing their business. The pestle of the husking-machine that flattens the paddy constantly falls into the hole of the mortar. The woman turns the paddy in the hole with one hand and with the other holds her baby on her lap as she nurses it. In the mean time customers arrive. The machine goes on pounding the paddy, and she carries on her bargains with the customers. She says to them, 'Pay the few pennies you owe me before you take anything more.' You see, she has all these things to do at the same time—nurse the baby, turn the paddy as the pestle pounds it, take the flattened rice out of the hole, and talk to the buyers. This is called the *yoga* of practice. Fifteen parts of her mind out of sixteen are fixed on the pestle of the husking-machine, lest it should pound her hand. With only one part of her mind she nurses the baby and talks to the buyers.

Likewise, he who leads the life of a householder should devote fifteen parts of his mind to God ; otherwise he will face ruin and fall into the clutches of Death. He should perform the duties of the world with only one part of his mind.

"A man may lead the life of a householder after attaining Knowledge. But he must attain Knowledge first. If the milk of the mind is kept in the water of the world, they get mixed. Therefore he should turn the milk into curd and extract butter from it by churning it in solitude ; then he may keep the butter in the water of the world. Therefore, you see, spiritual discipline is necessary. When the aswatha tree is a mere sapling, it must be enclosed by a fence ; otherwise the cattle will eat it. But the fence may be taken away when the trunk grows thick and strong. Then even an elephant tied to the tree cannot harm it.

"Therefore at the beginning the aspirant should go into solitude now and then. Spiritual discipline is necessary. You want to eat rice ; suppose you sit down somewhere and say, 'Wood contains fire and fire cooks rice.' Can saying it cook the rice ? You must get two pieces of wood and by rubbing them together bring out the fire.

"By eating siddhi one becomes intoxicated and feels happy. But suppose you haven't eaten the stuff or done anything else with it ; you simply sit down somewhere and mutter, 'Siddhi ! siddhi !' Will that intoxicate you or make you happy ?

"You may learn a great deal from books ; but it is all futile if you have no love for God and no desire to realize Him. A mere pundit, without discrimination and renunciation, has his attention fixed on 'woman and gold'. The vulture soars very high but its eyes are fixed on the charnel-pit.

"That alone is Knowledge through which one is able to know God. All else is futile. Well, what is your idea about God ?"

SHRISH : "Sir, I feel that there is an All-knowing Person. We get an indication of His Knowledge by looking at His creation. Let me give an illustration. God has made devices to keep fish and other aquatic animals alive in cold regions. As water grows colder, it gradually shrinks. But the amazing thing is that, just before turning into ice, the water becomes light and expands. In the freezing cold, fish can easily live in the water of a lake : the surface of the lake may be frozen, but the water below is all liquid. If a very cold breeze blows, it is obstructed by the ice. The water below remains warm."

MASTER : "That God exists may be known by looking at the universe. But it is one thing to hear of God, another thing to see God, and still another thing to talk to God. Some have heard of milk, some have seen it, and some, again, have tasted it. You feel happy when you see milk ; you are nourished and strengthened when you drink it. You will get peace of mind only when you have seen God. You will enjoy bliss and gain strength only when you have talked to Him."

SHRISH : "We do not have time to pray to God."

MASTER (*with a smile*) : "That is true. Nothing comes to pass except at the right time. Going to bed, a child said to his mother, 'Mother, please

wake me up when I feel the call of nature.' 'My son,' said the mother, 'that urge itself will wake you up. I don't have to wake you.'

"It is all decided beforehand by God what each one shall receive. A mother-in-law used to measure rice with a dish for her daughters-in-law. But it was not enough for them. One day the dish was broken and that made the girls happy. But the mother-in-law said to them, 'Children, you may shout and dance, but I can measure the rice with the palm of my hand.'

(To Shrish) : "Surrender everything at the feet of God. What else can you do? Give Him the power of attorney. Let Him do whatever He thinks best. If you rely on a great man, he will never injure you."

"It is no doubt necessary to practise spiritual discipline; but there are two kinds of aspirants. The nature of the one kind is like that of the young monkey, and the nature of the other kind is like that of the kitten. The young monkey, with great exertion, somehow clings to its mother. Likewise, there are some aspirants who think that in order to realize God they must repeat His name a certain number of times, meditate on Him for a certain period, and practise a certain amount of austerity. An aspirant of this kind makes his own efforts to catch hold of God. But the kitten, of itself, cannot cling to its mother. It lies on the ground and cries, 'Mew, mew!' It leaves everything to its mother. The mother cat sometimes puts it on a bed, sometimes on the roof behind a pile of wood. She carries the kitten in her mouth hither and thither. The kitten doesn't know how to cling to the mother. Likewise, there are some aspirants who cannot practise spiritual discipline by calculating about japa or the period of meditation. All that they do is cry to God with yearning hearts. God hears their cry and cannot keep Himself away. He reveals Himself to them."

At noon the host wished to feed the Master and the devotees. Sri Ramakrishna was smilingly pacing the room. Now and then he exchanged a few words with the musician.

MUSICIAN : "It is God alone who is both the 'instrument' and the 'cause'. Duryodhana said to Krishna : 'O Lord, Thou art seated in my heart. I act as Thou makest me act.'"

MASTER (with a smile) : "Yes, that is true. It is God alone who acts through us. He is the Doer, undoubtedly, and man is His instrument. But it is also true that an action cannot fail to produce its result. Your stomach will certainly burn if you eat hot chilli. It is God who has ordained that chilli will burn your stomach. If you commit a sin, you must bear its fruit. But one who has attained perfection, realized God, cannot commit sin. An expert singer cannot sing a false note. A man with a trained voice sings the notes correctly : sa, re, ga, ma, pa, dha, ni."

The meal was ready. The Master and the devotees went to the inner court, where they were treated to a generous feast.

About three o'clock in the afternoon the Master was seated again in Ishan's drawing-room with M. and Shrish. He resumed his conversation with Shrish.

MASTER : "What is your attitude toward God? 'I am He', or 'Master and servant'? For the householder it is very good to look on God as the Master.

The householder is conscious of doing the duties of life himself. Under such conditions how can he say, 'I am He'? To him who says, 'I am He' the world appears to be a dream. His mind, his body, even his ego, are dreams to him. Therefore he cannot perform worldly duties. So it is very good for the householder to look on himself as the servant and on God as the Master.

"Hanuman had the attitude of a servant. He said to Rama : 'O Rama, sometimes I meditate on You as the whole and on myself as the part. Sometimes I feel that You are the Master and I am the servant. But when I have the Knowledge of Reality, I see that I am You and You are I.'

"In the state of Perfect Knowledge one may feel, 'I am He'; but that is far beyond the ordinary man's experience."

SHRISH : "That is true, sir. The attitude of a servant relieves a man of all his worries. The servant depends entirely upon his master. A dog is devoted to its master. It depends upon him and is at peace."

MASTER : "Well, what suits your taste—God with form or the formless Reality? But to tell you the truth, He who is formless is also endowed with form. To His bhaktas He reveals Himself as having a form. It is like a great ocean, an infinite expanse of water, without any trace of shore. Here and there some of the water has been frozen. Intense cold has turned it into ice. Just so, under the cooling influence, so to speak, of the bhakta's love, the Infinite appears to take a form. Again, the ice melts when the sun rises; it becomes water as before. Just so, one who follows the path of knowledge—the path of discrimination—does not see the form of God any more. To him everything is formless. The ice melts into formless water with the rise of the Sun of Knowledge. But mark this: form and formlessness belong to one and the same Reality."

At dusk the Master was ready to start for Dakshineswar. He stood on the south porch of the drawing-room, talking to Ishan. Someone remarked that the chanting of God's holy name did not always produce results. Ishan said : "How can you say that? The seeds of an aswatha tree are no doubt tiny, but in them lie the germs of big trees. It may take a very long time for them to grow."

"Yes, yes!" said the Master. "It takes a long time to see the effect."

Next to Ishan's was his father-in-law's house. Sri Ramakrishna stood at the door of this house, ready to get into the carriage. Ishan and his friends stood around to bid him adieu. Sri Ramakrishna said to Ishan : "You are living in the world as a mudfish lives in the mud. It lives in the mud but its body is not stained."

"There are both vidya and avidya in this world of maya. Who may be called a paramahamsa? He who, like a swan, can take the milk from a mixture of milk and water, leaving aside the water. He who, like an ant, can take the sugar from a mixture of sugar and sand, leaving aside the sand."

It was evening. The Master stopped at Ram's house on his way to Dakshineswar. He was taken to the drawing-room and there he engaged in conversation with Mahendra Goswami. Mahendra belonged to the Vaishnava sect and was Ram's neighbour. Sri Ramakrishna was fond of him.

MASTER : "The worshippers of Vishnu and the worshippers of Sakti will all ultimately reach one and the same goal ; the ways may be different. The true Vaishnavas do not criticize the Saktas."

GOSWAMI (*smiling*) : "Siva and Parvati are our Father and Mother."

Sri Ramakrishna, out of his stock of a dozen English words, said sweetly, "Thank you ! " Then he added, "Yes, Father and Mother ! "

GOSWAMI : "Besides, it is a sin to criticize anyone, especially a devotee of God. All sins may be forgiven, but not the sin of criticizing a devotee."

MASTER : "But this idea of sin does not by any means affect all. For instance, the Isvarakotis, such as Incarnations of God, are above sin. Sri Chaitanya is an example.

"A child, walking on a narrow ridge and holding to his father, may slip into the ditch. But that can never happen if the father holds the child by the hand.

"Listen. I prayed to the Divine Mother for pure love. I said to Her : 'Here is Thy righteousness, here is Thy unrighteousness. Take them both and give me pure love for Thee. Here is Thy purity, here is Thy impurity. Take them both and give me pure love for Thee. O Mother, here is Thy virtue, here is Thy vice. Take them both and give me pure love for Thee.'"

GOSWAMI : "Yes, sir. That is right."

MASTER : "You should undoubtedly bow before all views. But there is a thing called unswerving devotion to one ideal. True, you should salute everyone. But you must love one ideal with your whole soul. That is unswerving devotion.

"Hanuman could not take delight in any other form than that of Rama. The gopis had such single-minded love for the cowherd Krishna of Vrindavan that they did not care to see the turbaned Krishna of Dwaraka.

"A wife may serve her husband's brothers by fetching water, or in other ways, but she cannot serve them in the way she does her husband. With him she has a special relationship."

Ram treated the Master to sweets. Sri Ramakrishna was ready to start for Dakshineswar. He put on his woolen shawl and cap, and got into the carriage with M. and the other devotees. Ram and his friends saluted the Master.

Saturday, December 29, 1883

It was the day of the new moon, auspicious for the worship of the Divine Mother. At one o'clock in the afternoon Sri Ramakrishna got into a carriage to visit the temple of Kali at Kalighat. He intended to stop at Adhar's house on the way, since Adhar was to accompany him to the temple. While the carriage was waiting near the north porch of the Master's room, M. went to the Master and said, "Sir, may I also go with you ? "

MASTER : "Why ? "

M : "I should like to visit my home in Calcutta."

Sri Ramakrishna reflected a moment and said : "Must you go home ? Why ? You are quite all right here."

M. wanted to see his people a few hours, but evidently the Master did not approve.

Sunday, December 30, 1883

At three o'clock in the afternoon, while M. was walking up and down under a tree, a devotee came to him and said that the Master had sent for him. M. went to Sri Ramakrishna's room and found a number of devotees there. He saluted the Master.

Ram, Kedar, and others had arrived from Calcutta. Ram had brought with him the Vedantist monk whom the Master had visited near his garden a few days earlier. On that occasion Sri Ramakrishna had asked him to bring the sadhu to Dakshineswar.

The monk was sitting on the small couch with the Master. They were talking happily in Hindusthani.

MASTER : "What do you feel about all this ?"

MONK : "It is all like a dream."

MASTER : "Brahman alone is real and the world illusory. Well, sir, what is Brahman ?"

MONK : "Brahman is the Sound. It is Om."

MASTER : "But there must be something indicated by the sound. Isn't that so ?"

MONK : "That Itself is the thing indicated as well as the indicator."

At these words Sri Ramakrishna went into samadhi and sat motionless. The monk and the devotees looked wonderingly at him in his ecstatic condition. Kedar said to the monk : "Look at him, sir. This is samadhi."

The monk had read of samadhi but had never seen it before. After a few minutes the Master began gradually to come down to the normal plane of consciousness. He said to the Divine Mother : "Mother, I want to be normal. Please don't make me unconscious. I should like to talk to the sadhu about Satchidananda. Mother, I want to be merry talking about Satchidananda."

The monk was amazed to see the Master's condition and to hear these words. Sri Ramakrishna said to him : "Please do away with your 'I am He'. Let us now keep 'I' and 'Thou' to enjoy the fun."

A little later the Master was walking in the Panchavati with Ram, Kedar, M., and the other devotees.

MASTER (*to Kedar, with a smile*) : "What did you think of the sadhu ?"

KEDAR : "It is all dry knowledge. The pot has just been put on the fire, but as yet there is no rice in it."

MASTER : "That may be true. But he has renounced everything. He who has renounced the world has already made great progress. The sadhu belongs to the stage of the beginner. Nothing can be achieved without the realization of God. When a man is intoxicated with ecstatic love of God, he doesn't take delight in anything else. Then—

Cherish my precious Mother Syama
Tenderly within, O mind ;
May you and I alone behold Her,
Letting no one else intrude."

Kedar repeated the words of a song in keeping with the Master's feeling :

How shall I open my heart, O friend ?
 It is forbidden me to speak.
 I am about to die, for lack of a kindred soul
 To understand my misery. . . .

Sri Ramakrishna returned to his room. About four o'clock the door of the Kali temple was opened, and the Master walked to the temple with the monk ; M. accompanied them. Entering the inner chamber, the Master prostrated himself reverently before the image. The monk, with folded hands, also bowed his head repeatedly before Kali.

MASTER : " What do you think of Kali ? "

MONK (*with devotion*) : " Kali is supreme. "

MASTER : " Kali and Brahman are identical. Is that not so ? "

MONK : " As long as one's mind is turned to the outer world, one must accept Kali. As long as a man sees the outer world, and discriminates between good and evil, he must accept good and reject evil. To be sure, all names and forms are illusory ; but as long as the mind sees the outer world, the aspirant must give up woman. The ideas of good and evil are applied to one who is still a student on the path ; otherwise he will stray from the path of righteousness."

Thus conversing, the Master and the monk returned from the temple.

MASTER (*to M.*) : " Did you notice that the sadhu bowed before Kali ? "

M : " Yes, sir. "

Monday, December 31, 1883

At four o'clock in the afternoon the Master was sitting in his room with M., Rakhal, Latu, Harish, and other devotees.

Addressing M. and Balaram, the Master said : " Haladhari followed the path of knowledge. Day and night he used to study the Upanishads, the *Adhyatma Ramayana*, and similar books on Vedanta. He would turn up his nose at the mention of the forms of God. Once I ate from the leaf-plates of the beggars. At this Haladhari said to me, ' How will you be able to marry your children ? ' I said : ' You rascal ! Shall I ever have children ? May your mouth that repeats words from the *Gita* and the Vedanta be blighted ! ' Just fancy ! He declared that the world was illusory and, again, would meditate in the temple of Vishnu with turned-up nose."

In the evening Balaram and the other devotees returned to Calcutta. The Master remained in his room, absorbed in contemplation of the Divine Mother. After a while the sweet music of the evening worship in the temples was heard.

A little later the Master began to talk to the Mother in a tender voice that touched the heart of M., who was seated on the floor. After repeating, " Hari Om ! Hari Om ! Om ! ", the Master said : " Mother, don't make me unconscious with the Knowledge of Brahman. Mother, I don't want Brahmajnana. I want to be merry. I want to play." Again he said : " Mother,

I don't know the Vedanta ; and Mother, I don't even care to know. The Vedas and the Vedanta remain so far below when Thou art realized, O Divine Mother ! " Then he said : " O Krishna, I shall say to Thee, ' Eat, my Child ! Take this, my Child ! ' O Krishna, I shall say to Thee, ' My Child, Thou hast assumed this body for my sake.' "

Wednesday, January 2, 1884

Rakhal, Latu, Harish, Ramlal, and M. had been staying with Sri Ramakrishna at the temple garden. About three o'clock in the afternoon M. found the Master on the west porch of his room engaged in conversation with a Tantrik devotee. The Tantrik was wearing an ochre cloth. Sri Ramakrishna asked M. to sit by his side. Perhaps the Master intended to instruct him through his talk with the Tantrik devotee. Mahima Chakravarty had sent the latter to the Master.

MASTER (*to the Tantrik*) : " It is a part of the Tantrik discipline to drink wine from a human skull. This wine is called ' karana '. Isn't that so ? "

TANTRIK : " Yes, sir."

MASTER : " But I cannot touch wine at all."

TANTRIK : " You have spontaneous Divine Bliss. One who enjoys that Bliss wants nothing else."

MASTER : " I don't care for japa and austerity. But I have constant remembrance and consciousness of God.

" Tell me, when they speak of the six centres, what do they mean ? "

TANTRIK : " These are like different holy places. In each of the centres dwell Siva and Sakti. One cannot see them with the physical eyes. One cannot take them out by cutting open the body."

M. listened silently to the conversation. Looking at him, the Master asked the Tantrik devotee, " Can a man attain perfection without the help of a bija mantra, a sacred word from the guru ? "

TANTRIK : " Yes, he can if he has faith—faith in the words of the guru."

The Master turned to M. and said, drawing his attention, " Faith ! "

After the Tantrik devotee had taken his leave, Jaygopal Sen, a member of the Brahmo Samaj, arrived. The Master talked with him.

MASTER (*to Jaygopal*) : " One should not harbour malice toward any person or any opinion. The believers in the formless God and the worshippers of God with form are all, without exception, going toward God alone. The jnani, the yogi, the bhakta—all, without exception, are seeking Him alone. The follower of the path of knowledge calls Him ' Brahman '. The yogi calls Him ' Atman ' or ' Paramatman '. The bhakta calls Him ' Bhagavan ' . Further, it is said that there is the Eternal Lord and His Eternal Servant."

JAYGOPAL : " How can we know that all paths are true ? "

MASTER : " A man can reach God if he follows one path rightly. Then he can learn about all the other paths. It is like reaching the roof by some means or other. Then one is able to climb down by the wooden or stone stairs, by a bamboo pole, or even by a rope.

"A devotee can know everything when God's grace descends on him. If you but realize Him, you will be able to know all about Him. You should somehow meet the master of a house and become acquainted with him ; then he himself will tell you how many houses he owns and all about his gardens and government securities."

JAYGOPAL : "How does one receive the grace of God ?"

MASTER : "Constantly you have to chant the name and glories of God and give up worldly thoughts as much as you can. With the greatest effort you may try to bring water into your field for your crops, but it may all leak out through holes in the ridges. Then all your efforts to bring the water by digging a canal will be futile.

"You will feel restless for God when your heart becomes pure and your mind free from attachment to the things of the world. Then alone will your prayer reach God. A telegraph wire cannot carry messages if it has a break or some other defect.

"I used to cry for God all alone, with a longing heart. I used to weep, 'O God, where art Thou ?' Weeping thus, I would lose all consciousness of the world. My mind would merge in the Mahavayu.

"How can one attain *yoga* ? By completely renouncing attachment to worldly things. The mind must be pure and without blemish, like the telegraph wire that has no defect.

"One must not cherish any desire whatever. The devotion of a man who has any desire is selfish. But desireless devotion is love for its own sake. You may love me or not, but I love you : this is love for its own sake.

"The thing is that one must love God. Through intense love one attains the vision of Him. The attraction of the husband for the chaste wife, the attraction of the child for its mother, the attraction of worldly possessions for the worldly man—when a man can blend these three into one, and direct it all to God, then he gets the vision of God."

Jaygopal was a man of the world. Was this why the Master gave instruction suited to him ?

At eight o'clock that evening the Master was sitting in his room with Rakhal and M. It was the twenty-first day of M.'s stay with Sri Ramakrishna. The Master had forbidden him to indulge in reasoning.

MASTER (*to Rakhal*) : "It is not good to reason too much. First comes God, and then the world. Realize God first ; then you will know all about His world. (*To M. and Rakhal*) If first one is introduced to Jadu Mallick, then one can know everything about him—the number of his houses, gardens, government securities, and so on. For this reason the rishi Narada advised Valmiki¹

¹ The author of the *Ramayana*. It is said that this sage had lived the life of a highwayman. Coming in contact with Narada, he became eager to lead a spiritual life. Narada asked him to chant the holy name of Rama as a spiritual discipline ; but on account of the sinful tendency of his mind, Valmiki could not utter the holy word. He was then advised to repeat the word 'mara', the reverse of 'Rama'. Through yearning and earnestness the heart of the robber became purified, and it was then possible for him to chant Rama's name. As a result he attained perfection.

to repeat the word 'mara'. 'Ma' means God, and 'ra' the world. First comes God, and then the world. Krishnakishore said that the word 'mara' is a holy mantra because it was given to Valmiki by the rishi. 'Ma' means God, and 'ra' the world.

"Therefore, like Valmiki, one should at first renounce everything and cry to God in solitude with a longing heart. The first thing necessary is the vision of God; then comes reasoning—about the scriptures and the world.

(To M.) "That is why I have been telling you not to reason any more. I came from the pine-grove to say that to you. Through too much reasoning your spiritual life will be injured; you will at last become like Hazra. I used to roam at night in the streets, all alone, and cry to the Divine Mother, 'O Mother, blight with Thy thunderbolt my desire to reason!' Tell me that you won't reason any more."

M : "Yes, sir. I won't reason any more."

MASTER : "Everything can be achieved through bhakti alone. Those who want the Knowledge of Brahman will certainly achieve that also by following the trail of bhakti.

"Can a man blessed with the grace of God ever lack Knowledge? At Kamarpukur I have seen grain-dealers measuring paddy. As one heap is measured away another heap is pushed forward to be measured. The Mother supplies the devotees with the 'heap' of Knowledge.

"After attaining God, one looks on a pundit as mere straw and dust. Padmalochan said to me: 'What does it matter if I accompany you to a meeting at the house of a fisherman?' With you I can dine even at the house of a pariah.'

"Everything can be realized simply through love of God. If one is able to love God, one does not lack anything. Kartika and Ganesa¹ were seated near Bhagavati, who had a necklace of gems around Her neck. The Divine Mother said to them, 'I will present this necklace to him who is the first to go around the universe.' Thereupon Kartika, without losing a moment, set out on the peacock, his carrier. Ganesa, on the other hand, in a leisurely fashion went around the Divine Mother and prostrated himself before Her. He knew that She contained within Herself the entire universe. The Divine Mother was pleased with him and put the necklace around his neck. After a long while Kartika returned and found his brother seated there with the necklace on.

"Weeping, I prayed to the Mother: 'O Mother, reveal to me what is contained in the Vedas and the Vedanta. Reveal to me what is in the Purana and the Tantra.' One by one She has revealed all these to me.

"Yes, She has taught me everything. Oh, how many things She has shown me! One day She showed me Siva and Sakti everywhere. Everywhere I saw the communion of Siva and Sakti. Siva and Sakti existing in all living things—men, animals, trees, plants. I saw Them in the communion of all male and female elements.

¹ A reference to Mathur Babu, who belonged to the fisherman caste. The orthodox brahmin refuses to set foot in the house of a fisherman, who belongs to a low caste.

² The two sons of Bhagavati, the Divine Mother.

"Another day I was shown heaps of human heads, mountain high. Nothing else existed, and I was seated alone in their midst.

"Still another day She showed me an ocean. Taking the form of a salt doll, I was going to measure its depth. While doing this, through the grace of the guru I was turned to stone. Then I saw a ship and at once got into it. The helmsman was the guru. I hope you pray every day to Satchidananda, who is the Guru. Do you ?"

M : "Yes, sir."

MASTER : "The guru was the helmsman in that boat. I saw that 'I' and 'you' were two different things. Again I jumped into the ocean, and was changed into a fish. I found myself swimming joyfully in the Ocean of Satchidananda.

"These are all deep mysteries. What can you understand through reasoning ? You will realize everything when God Himself teaches you. Then you will not lack any knowledge."

Friday, January 4, 1884

Sri Ramakrishna was sitting in his room. M. was still staying with the Master, devoting his time to the practice of spiritual discipline. He had been spending a great part of each day in prayer and meditation under the bel-tree, where the Master had performed great austerities and had seen many wonderful visions of God.

MASTER (*to M.*) : "Don't reason any more. In the end, reasoning only injures the aspirant. One should assume a particular attitude toward God while praying to Him—the attitude of friend or servant or son or 'hero' .

"I assume the attitude of a child. To me every woman is my mother. The divine Maya, seeing this attitude in an aspirant, moves away from his path out of sheer shame.

"The attitude of 'hero' is extremely difficult. The Saktas and the Bauls among the Vaishnavas follow it, but it is very hard to keep one's spiritual life pure in that attitude. One can assume other attitudes toward God as well—the attitude in which the devotee serenely contemplates God as the Creator, the attitude of service to Him, the attitude of friendship, the attitude of motherly affection, or the attitude of conjugal love. The conjugal relationship, the attitude of a woman to her husband or sweetheart, contains all the rest—serenity, service, friendship, and motherly affection. (*To M.*) Which one of these appeals to your mind ?"

M : "I like them all."

MASTER : "When one attains perfection one takes delight in all these relationships. In that state a devotee has not the slightest trace of lust. The holy books of the Vaishnavas speak of Chandidas and the washerwoman. Their love was entirely free from lust.

"In that state a devotee looks on himself as a woman. He does not regard himself as a man. Sanatana Goswami refused to see Mirabai because she was a woman. Mira informed him that at Vrindavan the only man was

Krishna and that all others were His handmaids. 'Was it right of Sanatana to think of himself as a man ?' Mira inquired."

At dusk M. was sitting at the Master's feet. Sri Ramakrishna had been told that Keshab's illness had taken a turn for the worse. He was talking about Keshab and incidentally about the Brahmo Samaj.

MASTER (*to M.*) : "Do they only give lectures in the Brahmo Samaj ? Or do they also meditate ? I understand that they call their service in the temple 'upasana' ."

"Keshab at one time thought a great deal of Christianity and the Christian views. At that time, and even before, he belonged to Devendranath Tagore's organization."

M : "Had Keshab Babu come here from the very beginning, he would not have been so preoccupied with social reform. He would not have been so busy with the abolition of the caste-system, widow remarriage, intercaste marriage, women's education, and such social activities."

MASTER : "Keshab now believes in Kali as the Embodiment of Spirit and Consciousness, the Primal Energy. Besides, he repeats the holy name of the Mother and chants Her glories.

"Do you think the Brahmo Samaj will develop in the future into a sort of social-reform organization ?"

M : "The soil of this country is different. Only what is true survives here."

MASTER : "Yes, that is so. The Sanatana Dharma, the Eternal Religion declared by the rishis, will alone endure. But there will also remain some sects like the Brahmo Samaj. Everything appears and disappears through the will of God."

Earlier in the afternoon several devotees from Calcutta had visited the Master and had sung many songs. One of the songs contained the following idea : "O Mother, You have cajoled us with red toys. You will certainly come running to us when we throw them away and cry ourselves hoarse for You."

MASTER (*to M.*) : "How well they sang about the red toys !"

M : "Yes, sir. You once told Keshab about the red toys."

MASTER : "Yes. I also told him about the Chidakasa, the Inner Consciousness, and about many other things. Oh, how happy we were ! We used to sing and dance together."

Saturday, January 5, 1884

It was the twenty-third day of M.'s stay with Sri Ramakrishna. M. had finished his midday meal about one o'clock and was resting in the nahabat when suddenly he heard someone call his name three or four times. Coming out, he saw Sri Ramakrishna calling to him from the verandah north of his room.

M. saluted the Master and they conversed on the south verandah.

MASTER : "I want to know how you meditate. When I meditated under the bel-tree I used to see various visions clearly. One day I saw in front of me money, a shawl, a tray of sandesh, and two women. I asked my mind,

'Mind, do you want any of these?' I saw the sandesh to be mere filth. One of the women had a big ring in her nose. I could see both their inside and outside—entrails, filth, bone, flesh, and blood. The mind did not want any of these—money, shawl, sweets, or women. It remained fixed at the Lotus Feet of God.

"A small balance has two needles, the upper and the lower. The mind is the lower needle. I was always afraid lest the mind should move away from the upper needle—God. Further, I would see a man always sitting by me with a trident in his hand. He threatened to strike me with it if the lower needle moved away from the upper one.

"But no spiritual progress is possible without the renunciation of 'woman and gold'. I renounced these three : land, wife, and wealth. Once I went to the Registry Office to register some land, the title of which was in the name of Raghuvir. The officer asked me to sign my name ; but I didn't do it, because I couldn't feel that it was 'my' land. I was shown much respect as the guru of Keshab Sen. They presented me with mangoes, but I couldn't carry them home. A sannyasi cannot lay things up.

"How can one expect to attain God without renunciation? Suppose one thing is placed upon another ; how can you get the second without removing the first?

"One must pray to God without any selfish desire. But selfish worship, if practised with perseverance, is gradually turned into selfless worship. Dhruba practised tapasya to obtain his kingdom, but at last he realized God. He said, 'Why should a man give up gold if he gets it while searching for glass beads?'

"God can be realized when a man acquires sattva. Householders engage in philanthropic work, such as charity, mostly with a motive. That is not good. But actions without motives are good. Yet it is very difficult to leave motives out of one's actions.

"When you realize God, will you pray to Him, 'O God, please grant that I may dig reservoirs, build roads, and found hospitals and dispensaries'? After the realization of God all such desires are left behind.

"Then mustn't one perform acts of compassion, such as charity to the poor? I do not forbid it. If a man has money, he should give it to remove the sorrows and sufferings that come to his notice. In such an event the wise man says, 'Give the poor something.' But inwardly he feels : 'What can I do? God alone is the Doer. I am nothing.'

"The great souls, deeply affected by the sufferings of men, show them the way to God. Sankaracharya kept the 'ego of Knowledge' in order to teach mankind. The gift of knowledge and devotion is far superior to the gift of food. Therefore Chaitanyadeva distributed bhakti to all, including the outcaste. Happiness and suffering are the inevitable characteristics of the body. You have come to eat mangoes. Fulfil that desire. The one thing needful is jnana and bhakti. God alone is Substance ; all else is illusory.

"It is God alone who does everything. You may say that in that case man may commit sin. But that is not true. If a man is firmly convinced that

God alone is the Doer and that he himself is nothing, then he will never make a false step.

"It is God alone who has planted in man's mind what the 'Englishman' ⁴ calls free will. People who have not realized God would become engaged in more and more sinful actions if God had not planted in them the notion of free will. Sin would have increased if God had not made the sinner feel that he alone was responsible for his sin."

"Those who have realized God are aware that free will is a mere appearance. In reality man is the machine and God its Operator, man is the carriage and God its Driver."

It was about four o'clock. Rakhal and several other devotees were listening to a kirtan by M. in the hut at the Panchavati. Rakhal went into a spiritual mood while listening to the devotional song. After a while the Master came to the Panchavati accompanied by Baburam and Harish. Other devotees followed.

RAKHAL : "How well he [referring to M.] sang kirtan for us ! He made us all very happy."

The Master sang in an ecstatic mood :

O friends, how great is my relief
To hear you chanting Krishna's name !

To the devotees he said, "Always sing devotional songs." Continuing, he said : "To love God and live in the company of the devotees : that is all. What more is there ?" He said, again : "When Krishna went to Mathura, Yasoda came to Radha, who was absorbed in meditation. Afterwards Radha said to Yasoda : 'I am the Primordial Energy. Ask a boon of Me.' 'What other boon shall I ask of You ?' said Yasoda. 'Only bless me that I may serve God with my body, mind, and tongue ; that I may behold His devotees with these eyes, that I may meditate on Him with this mind, and that I may chant His name and glories with this tongue.'

"But those who are firmly established in God may do as well without the devotees. This is true of those who feel the presence of God both within and without. Sometimes they don't enjoy the devotees' company. You don't whitewash a wall inlaid with mother of pearl—the lime won't stick."

The Master returned presently from the Panchavati, talking to M.

MASTER : "You have the voice of a woman. Can't you practise a song such as this ?—

Tell me, friend, how far is the grove
Where Krishna, my Beloved, dwells ?

(To M., pointing to Baburam) "You see, my own people have become strangers ; Ramlal and my other relatives seem to be foreigners. And strangers have become my own. Don't you notice how I tell Baburam to go and wash his face ? The devotees have become relatives."

⁴ Sri Ramakrishna used this word to denote Europeans in general, and also those whose ways and thoughts were largely influenced by Western ideas.

(*Looking at the Panchavati*) "I used to sit there. In course of time I became mad. That phase also passed away. Kala, Siva, is Brahman. That which sports with Kala is Kali, the Primal Energy. Kali moves even the Immutable."

Saying this, the Master sang :

My mind is overwhelmed with wonder,
Pondering the Mother's mystery :
Her very name removes
The fear of Kala, Death himself :
Beneath Her feet lies Maha-Kala. . .

Then he said to M. : " Today is Saturday. Go to the temple of Kali."

As the Master came to the bakul-tree he spoke to M. again : " Chidatma and Chitsakti. The Purusha is the Chidatma and Prakriti is the Chitsakti. Sri Krishna is the Chidatma and Sri Radha the Chitsakti. The devotees are so many forms of the Chitsakti. They should think of themselves as companions or handmaids of the Chitsakti, Sri Radha. This is the whole gist of the thing."

After dusk Sri Ramakrishna went to the Kali temple and was pleased to see M. meditating there.

The evening worship was over in the temples. The Master returned to his room and sat on the couch, absorbed in meditation on the Divine Mother. M. sat on the floor. There was no one else in the room.

The Master was in samadhi. He began to come gradually down to the normal plane. His mind was still filled with the consciousness of the Divine Mother. In that state he was speaking to Her like a small child making importunate demands on his mother. He said in a piteous voice : "Mother, why haven't You revealed to me that form of Yours, the form that bewitches the world ? I pleaded with You so much for it. But You wouldn't listen to me. You act as You please."

The voice in which these words were uttered was very touching.

He went on: "Mother, one needs faith. Away with this wretched reasoning ! Let it be blighted ! One needs faith—faith in the words of the guru, childlike faith. - The mother says to her child, 'A ghost lives there', and the child is firmly convinced that the ghost is there. Again, the mother says to the child, 'A bogey man is there', and the child is sure of it. Further, the mother says, pointing to a man, 'He is your elder brother', and the child believes that the man is one hundred and twenty-five per cent his brother. One needs faith. But why should I blame them, Mother ? What can they do ? It is necessary to go through reasoning once. Didn't You see how much I told him about it the other day ? But it all proved useless.

The Master was weeping and praying to the Mother in a voice choked with emotion. He prayed to Her with tearful eyes for the welfare of the devotees : "Mother, may those who come to You have all their desires fulfilled ! But please don't make them give up everything at once, Mother. Well,

⁵ Saturday and Tuesday are regarded as auspicious days for the worship of the Divine Mother.

You may do whatever You like in the end. If You keep them in the world; Mother, then please reveal Yourself to them now and then. Otherwise, how will they live? How will they be encouraged if they don't see You once in a while? But You may do whatever You like in the end."

The Master was still in the ecstatic mood. Suddenly he said to M : "Look here, you have had enough of reasoning. No more of it. Promise that you won't reason any more."

M. (*with folded hands*) : "Yes, sir. I won't."

MASTER : "You have had enough of it. When you came to me the first time, I told you your spiritual Ideal. I know everything about you, do I not?"

M. (*with folded hands*) : "Yes, sir."

MASTER : "Yes, I know everything : what your Ideal is, who you are, your inside and outside, the events of your past lives, and your future. Do I not?"

M. (*with folded hands*) : "Yes, sir."

MASTER : "I scolded you on learning that you had a son. Now go home and live there. Let them know that you belong to them. But you must remember in your heart of hearts that you do not belong to them nor they to you."

M. sat in silence. The Master went on instructing him.

MASTER : "You have now learnt to fly. But keep your loving relationship with your father. Can't you prostrate yourself before him?"

M. (*with folded hands*) : "Yes, sir. I can."

MASTER : "What more shall I say to you? You know everything. You understand, don't you?"

M. sat there without uttering a word.

MASTER : "You have understood, haven't you?"

M. "Yes, sir, I now understand a little."

MASTER : "No, you understand a great deal. Rakhal's father is pleased about his staying here."

M. remained with folded hands.

MASTER : "Yes, what you are thinking will also come to pass."

Sri Ramakrishna now came down to the normal state of mind. Rakhal and Ramlal entered the room. At the Master's bidding Ramlal sang :

Who is the Woman yonder who lights the field of battle?
Darker Her body gleams even than the darkest storm-cloud
And from Her teeth there flash the lightning's blinding flames! . . .

He sang again :

Who is this terrible Woman, dark as the sky of midnight?
Who is this Woman dancing over the field of battle? . . .

MASTER : "The Divine Mother and the earthly mother. It is the Divine Mother who exists in the form of the universe and pervades everything as Consciousness. The earthly mother gives birth to this body. I used to go into samadhi uttering the word 'Ma'. While repeating the word I would draw the Mother of the Universe to me, as it were, like the fishermen casting

their net and after a while drawing it in. When they draw in the net they find big fish inside it.

"Gauri once said that one attains true Knowledge when one realizes the identity of Kali and Gauranga.⁶ That which is Brahman is also Sakti, Kali. It is That, again, which, assuming the human form, has become Gauranga."

At the Master's request, Ramlal sang again, this time about Gauranga.

MASTER (*to M.*) : "The Nitya and the Lila are the two aspects of the Reality. God plays in the world as man for the sake of His devotees. They can love God only if they see Him in a human form ; only then can they show their affection for Him as their Brother, Sister, Father, Mother, or Child.

"It is just for this love of the devotees that God contracts Himself into a human form and descends on earth to play His lila."

⁶ An uncompromising hostility exists between the devotees of Kali and the devotees of Gauranga.

XIX

THE MASTER AND HIS INJURED ARM

Saturday, February 2, 1884

IT WAS THREE O'CLOCK in the afternoon. Sri Ramakrishna had been conversing with Rakhal, Mahimacharan, Hazra, and other devotees, when M. entered the room and saluted him. He brought with him splint, pad, and lint to bandage the Master's injured arm.

One day, while going toward the pine-grove, Sri Ramakrishna had fallen near the railing and dislocated a bone in his left arm. He had been in an ecstatic mood at the time and no one had been with him.

MASTER (*to M.*) : "Hello! What was ailing you? Are you quite well now?"

M : "Yes, Sir, I am all right now."

MASTER (*to Mahima*) : "Well, if I am the machine and God is its Operator, then why should this have happened to me?"

The Master was sitting on the couch, listening to the story of Mahimacharan's pilgrimage. Mahima had visited several holy places twelve years before.

MAHIMA : "I found a brahmachari in a garden at Sicrole in Benares. He said he had been living there for twenty years but did not know its owner. He asked me if I worked in an office. On my answering in the negative, he said, 'Then are you a wandering holy man?' I saw a sadhu on the bank of the Narmada. He repeated the Gayatri mentally. It so thrilled him that the hair on his body stood on end. And when he repeated the Gayatri and Om aloud, it thrilled those who sat near him and caused their hair to stand on end."

The Master was in the mood of a child. Being hungry he said to M., "What have you brought for me?" Looking at Rakhal he went into samadhi.

He was gradually coming down to the normal plane. To bring his mind back to the consciousness of the body, he said : "I shall eat some jilipi. I shall drink some water."

Weeping like a child, he said to the Divine Mother : "O Brahmamayi! O Mother! Why hast Thou done this to me? My arm is badly hurt. (*To the devotees*) Will I be all right again?" They consoled him, as one would a child, and said : "Surely. You will be quite well again."

MASTER (*to Rakhal*) : " You aren't to blame for it, though you are living here to look after me ; for even if you had accompanied me, you certainly wouldn't have gone up to the railing."

The Master again went into a spiritual mood and said : " Om ! Om ! Om ! Mother, what is this that I am saying ? Don't make me unconscious, Mother, with the Knowledge of Brahman. Don't give me Brahmajnana. I am but Thy child. I am easily worried and frightened. I want a Mother. A million salutations to the Knowledge of Brahman ! Give it to those who seek it. O Anandamayi ! O Blissful Mother ! "

Uttering loudly the word " Anandamayi ", he burst into tears and said :

Mother, this is the grief that sorely grieves my heart,
That even with Thee for Mother, and though I am wide awake,
There should be robbery in my house.

Again he said to the Divine Mother : " What wrong have I done, Mother ? Do I ever do anything ? It is Thou, Mother, who doest everything. I am the machine and Thou art its Operator.

(*To Rakhal, smiling*) " See that you don't fall ! Don't be piqued and cheat yourself."

Again addressing the Mother, Sri Ramakrishna said : " Do I weep because I am hurt ? Not at all.

Mother, this is the grief that sorely grieves my heart,
That even with Thee for Mother, and though I am wide awake,
There should be robbery in my house."

The Master was again talking and laughing, like a child who, though ailing, sometimes forgets his illness and laughs and plays about.

MASTER (*to the devotees*) : " It will avail you nothing unless you realize Satchidananda. There is nothing like discrimination and renunciation. The worldly man's devotion to God is momentary—like a drop of water on a red-hot frying-pan. Perchance he looks at a flower and exclaims, ' Ah, what a wonderful creation of God ! '

" One must be restless for God. ■ a son clamours persistently for his share of the property, his parents consult with each other and give it to him even though he is a minor. God will certainly listen to your prayers if you feel restless for Him. Since He has begotten us, surely we can claim our inheritance from Him. He is our own Father, our own Mother. We can force our demand on Him. We can say to Him, ' Reveal Thyself to me or I shall cut my throat with a knife ! '

Sri Ramakrishna taught the devotees how to call on the Divine Mother.

MASTER : " I used to pray to Her in this way : ' O Mother ! O Blissful One ! Reveal Thyself to me. Thou must ! ' Again, I would say to Her : ' O Lord of the lowly ! O Lord of the universe ! Surely I am not outside Thy universe. I am bereft of knowledge. I am without discipline. I have no devotion. I know nothing. Thou must be gracious and reveal Thyself to me.' "

Thus the Master taught the devotees how to pray. They were deeply touched. Tears filled Mahimacharan's eyes.

Sri Ramakrishna looked at him and sang :

Cry to your Mother Syama with a real cry, O mind !
 And how can She hold Herself from you ?
 How can Syama stay away ? . . .

Several devotees arrived from Shibpur. Since they had come from a great distance the Master could not disappoint them. He told them some of the essentials of spiritual life.

MASTER : " God alone is real, and all else illusory. The garden and its owner. God and His splendour. But people look at the garden only. How few seek out the owner ! "

A DEVOTEE : " Sir, what is the way ? "

MASTER : " Discrimination between the Real and the unreal. One should always discriminate to the effect that God alone is real and the world unreal. And one should pray with sincere longing."

DEVOTEE : " But, sir, where is our leisure for these things ? "

MASTER : " Those who have the time must meditate and worship. But those who cannot possibly do so must bow down whole-heartedly to God twice a day. He abides in the hearts of all ! He knows that worldly people have many things to do. What else is possible for them ? You don't have time to pray to God ; therefore give Him the power of attorney. But all is in vain unless you attain God and see Him."

ANOTHER DEVOTEE : " Sir, to see you is the same as to see God."

MASTER : " Don't ever say that again. The waves belong to the Ganges, not the Ganges to the waves. A man cannot realize God unless he gets rid of all such egotistic ideas as ' I am such an important man ' or ' I am so and so '. Level the mound of ' I ' to the ground by dissolving it with tears of devotion."

DEVOTEE : " Why has God put us in the world ? "

MASTER : " To perpetuate His creation. It is His will, His maya. He has deluded man with ' woman and gold '."

DEVOTEE : " Why has He deluded us ? Why has He so willed ? "

MASTER : " If but once He should give man a taste of divine joy, then man would not care to lead a worldly life. The creation would come to an end.

" The grain-dealer stores rice in huge bags in his warehouse. Near them he puts some puffed rice in a tray. This is to keep the rats away. The puffed rice tastes sweet to the rats and they nibble at it all night ; they do not seek the rice itself. But just think ! One seer of rice yields fourteen seers of puffed rice. How infinitely superior is the joy of God to the pleasure of ' woman and gold ' ! To one who thinks of the beauty of God, the beauty of even Rambha and Tilottama¹ appears as but the ashes of a funeral pyre."

DEVOTEE : " Why do we not feel intense restlessness to realize Him ? "

MASTER : " A man does not feel restless for God until all his worldly desires are satisfied. He does not remember the Mother of the Universe until his share of the enjoyment of ' woman and gold ' is completed. A child absorbed

¹ Two celestial dancing-girls of exquisite beauty.

in play does not seek his mother. But after his play is over, he says, 'Mother ! I must go to my mother.' Hriday's son was playing with the pigeons, calling to them, 'Come ! Ti, ti !' When he had had enough of play he began to cry. Then a stranger came and said : 'Come with me. I will take you to your mother.' Unhesitatingly he climbed on the man's shoulders and was off.

"Those who are eternally free do not have to enter worldly life. Their desire for enjoyment has been satisfied with their very birth."

At five o'clock in the afternoon Dr. Madhusudan arrived. While he prepared the bandage for the Master's arm, Sri Ramakrishna laughed like a child and said, "You are the Madhusudan² of both this world and the next !"

DR. MADHUSUDAN (*smiling*) : "I only labour under the weight of my name."

MASTER (*smiling*) : "Why, is the *name* a trifling thing ? God is not different from His name. Satyabhama tried to balance Krishna with gold and precious stones, but could not do it. Then Rukmini put a tulsi-leaf with the name of Krishna on the scales. That balanced the Lord."

The doctor was ready to bandage the Master's arm. A bed was spread on the floor and the Master, laughing, lay down upon it. He said, intoning the words : "Ah ! This is Radha's final stage. But Brinde says, 'Who knows what is yet to be ?'"

The devotees were sitting around the Master. He sang :

The gopis all were gathered about the shore of the lake.

Sri Ramakrishna laughed and the devotees laughed with him.

After his arm was bandaged he said : "I haven't very much faith in your Calcutta physicians. When Sambhu became delirious, Dr. Sarvadhikari said : 'Oh, it is nothing. It is just grogginess from the medicine. And a little while after, Sambhu' breathed his last."

It was evening and the worship in the temples was over. A few minutes later Adhar arrived from Calcutta to see the Master. Mahimacharan, Rakhal, and M. were in the room.

ADHAR : "How are you ?"

MASTER (*affectionately*) : "Look here. How my arm hurts ! (*Smiling*) You don't have to ask how I am !"

Adhar sat on the floor with the devotees. The Master said to him, "Please stroke here gently." Adhar sat on the end of the couch and gently stroked Sri Ramakrishna's feet.

The Master conversed with Mahimacharan.

MASTER : "It will be very good if you can practise unselfish love for God. A man who has such love says : 'O Lord, I do not seek salvation, fame, wealth, or cure of disease. None of these do I seek. I want only Thee. Many are the people who come to a rich man with various desires. But if someone comes to him simply out of love, not wanting any favour, then the

² Also a name of Krishna.

³ Sambhu Mallick died in 1877.



rich man feels attracted to him. Prahlada had this unselfish love, this pure love for God without any worldly end."

Mahimacharan sat silent. The Master turned to him.

MASTER : "Now let me tell you something that will agree with your mood. According to the Vedanta one has to know the real nature of one's own Self. But such knowledge is impossible without the renunciation of ego. The ego is like a stick that seems to divide the water in two. It makes you feel that you are one and I am another. When the ego disappears in samadhi, then one knows Brahman to be one's own inner consciousness.

"One must renounce the 'I' that makes one feel, 'I am Mahima Chakravarty', 'I am a learned man', and so on. But the 'ego of Knowledge' does not injure one. Sankaracharya retained the 'ego of Knowledge' in order to teach mankind.

"One cannot obtain the Knowledge of Brahman unless one is extremely cautious about women. Therefore it is very difficult for those who live in the world to get such Knowledge. However clever you may be, you will stain your body if you live in a sooty room. The company of a young woman evokes lust even in a lustless man.

"But it is not so harmful for a householder who follows the path of knowledge to enjoy conjugal happiness with his own wife now and then. He may satisfy his sexual impulse like any other natural impulse. Yes, you may enjoy a sweetmeat once in a while. (*Mahimacharan laughs.*) It is not so harmful for a householder.

"But it is extremely harmful for a sannyasi. He must not look even at the portrait of a woman. A monk enjoying a woman is like a man swallowing the spittle he has already spat out. A sannyasi must not sit near a woman and talk to her, even if she is intensely pious. No, he must not talk to a woman even though he may have controlled his passion.

"A sannyasi must renounce both 'woman' and 'gold'. As he must not look even at the portrait of a woman, so also he must not touch gold, that is to say, money. It is bad for him even to keep money near him, for it brings in its train calculation, worry, insolence, anger, and such evils. There is an instance in the sun : it shines brightly ; suddenly a cloud appears and hides it.

"That is why I didn't agree to the Marwari's depositing money for me with Hriday. I said : 'No, I won't allow even that. If I keep money near me, it will certainly raise clouds.'

"Why all these strict rules for a sannyasi ? It is for the welfare of mankind as well as for his own good. A sannyasi may himself lead an unattached life and may have controlled his passion, but he must renounce 'woman and gold' to set an example to the world.

"A man will have the courage to practise renunciation if he sees one hundred per cent renunciation in a sannyasi. Then only will he try to give up 'woman and gold'. If a sannyasi does not set this example, then who will ?

"One may lead a householder's life after realizing God. It is like churning butter from milk and then keeping the butter in water. Janaka led the life of a householder after attaining Brahmajnana.

"Janaka fenced with two swords, the one of jnana and the other of karma. The sannyasi renounces action; therefore he fences with one sword only, that of knowledge. A householder, endowed with knowledge like Janaka's, can enjoy fruit both from the tree and from the ground. He can serve holy men, entertain guests, and do other things like that. I said to the Divine Mother, 'O Mother, I don't want to be a dry sadhu.'

"After attaining Brahmajnana one does not have to discriminate even about food. The rishis of olden times, endowed with the Knowledge of Brahman and having experienced divine bliss, ate everything, even pork.

(To Mahima) "Generally speaking there are two kinds of yoga : karma-yoga and manoyoga, that is to say, union with God through work and through the mind.

"There are four stages of life : brahmacharya, garhasthya, vanaprastha, and sannyasa. During the first three stages a man has to perform his worldly duties. The sannyasi carries only his staff, water-pot, and begging-bowl. He too may perform certain nityakarma, but his mind is not attached to it ; he is not conscious of doing such work. Some sanyasis perform nityakarma to set an example to the world. If a householder or a man belonging to the other stages of life performs action without attachment, then he is united with God through such action.

"In the case of a paramahamsa, like Sukadeva, all karmas—all puja, japa, tarpan, sandhya, and so forth—drop away. In this state a man communes with God through the mind alone. Sometimes he may be pleased to perform outward activities for the welfare of mankind. But his recollection and contemplation of God remain uninterrupted."

It was about eight o'clock in the evening. Sri Ramakrishna asked Mahimacharan to recite a few hymns from the scriptures. Mahima read the first verse of the *Uttara Gita*, describing the nature of the Supreme Brahman :

He, Brahman, is one, partless, stainless, and beyond the ether ;
Without beginning or end, unknowable by mind or intelligence.

Finally he came to the seventh verse of the third chapter, which reads :

The twice-born ' worships the Deity in fire,
The munis contemplate Him in the heart,
Men of limited wisdom see Him in the image,
And the yogis who have attained samesightedness
Behold Him everywhere.

No sooner did the Master hear the words "the yogis who have attained samesightedness" than he stood up and went into samadhi, his arm supported by the splint and bandage. Speechless, the devotees looked at this yogi who had himself attained the state of samesightedness.

After a long time the Master regained consciousness of the outer world and took his seat. He asked Mahima to recite verses describing the love of God. The latter recited from the *Narada Pancharatra* :

A man belonging to the brahmin, kshatriya, or vaisya caste, who has his second or spiritual birth at the time of his investiture with the sacred thread.

What need is there of penance if God is worshipped with love ?
 What is the use of penance if God is not worshipped with love ?
 What need is there of penance if God is seen within and without ?
 What is the use of penance if God is not seen within and without ?

O Brahman ! O my child ! Cease from practising further penances.
 Hasten to Sankara, the Ocean of Heavenly Wisdom :
 Obtain from Him the love of God, the pure love praised by devotees,
 Which snaps in twain the shackles that bind you to the world.

MASTER : " Ah ! Ah ! "

On hearing these verses the Master was about to go again into an ecstatic mood, but he restrained himself with effort.

Mahima read from the *Yatipanchaka* :

I am She, the Divine Mother, in whom the illusion of the universe of animate and inanimate things is seen, as in magic, and in whom the universe shines, being the play of Her mind. I am She, the Embodiment of Consciousness, who is the Self of the universe, the only Existence, Knowledge, and Bliss.

When the Master heard the line, "I am She, the Embodiment of Consciousness", he said with a smile, "Whatever is in the microcosm is also in the macrocosm."

Next Mahima read the Six Stanzas on Nirvana :

Om. I am neither mind, intelligence, ego, nor chitta,
 Neither ears nor tongue nor the senses of smell and sight :
 Nor am I ether, earth, fire, water, or air :
 I am Pure Knowledge and Bliss : I am Siva ! I am Siva !

I am neither the prana, nor the five vital breaths,
 Neither the seven elements of the body nor its five sheaths,
 Nor hands nor feet nor tongue, nor the organs of sex and voiding :
 I am Pure Knowledge and Bliss : I am Siva ! I am Siva !

Neither loathing nor liking have I, neither greed nor delusion :
 No sense have I of ego or pride, neither dharma nor moksha :
 Neither desire of the mind nor object for its desiring :
 I am Pure Knowledge and Bliss : I am Siva ! I am Siva !

Neither right nor wrongdoing am I, neither pleasure nor pain,
 Nor the mantra, the sacred place, the Vedas, the sacrifice :
 Neither the act of eating, the eater, nor the food :
 I am Pure Knowledge and Bliss : I am Siva ! I am Siva !

Death or fear I have none, nor any distinction of caste :
 • Neither father nor mother nor even a birth have I :
 Neither friend nor comrade, neither disciple nor guru :
 I am Pure Knowledge and Bliss : I am Siva ! I am Siva !

I have no form or fancy ; the All-pervading am I :
 Everywhere I exist, yet I am beyond the senses :
 Neither salvation am I, nor anything that may be known :
 I am Pure Knowledge and Bliss : I am Siva ! I am Siva !

Each time Mahima repeated : "I am Siva ! I am Siva !", the Master rejoined with a smile : "Not I ! Not I ! Thou art Knowledge Absolute."

Mahima read a few more verses and also a description of the six psychic centres of the body. He said that in Benares he had witnessed the death of a yogi in the state of yoga.

MAHIMA : "There are fine passages in the *Rama Gita*."

MASTER : "You are speaking of the *Rama Gita*. Then you must be a staunch Vedantist. How many books of that kind the sadhus used to read here !"

Mahima recited the description of Om :

It is like the unceasing flow of oil, like the long peal of a bell.

About the characteristics of samadhi he read : "The man established in samadhi sees the upper region filled with Atman, the nether region filled with Atman, the middle region filled with Atman. He sees all filled with Atman."

Adhar and Mahima saluted the Master and departed.

At noon the following day, after his midday meal, Sri Ramakrishna was sitting on the small couch, when Ram, Surendra, and a few other devotees arrived from Calcutta. They were worried about the Master's injured arm. The arm was bandaged. M. was present.

MASTER (*to the devotees*) : "The Mother has put me in such a state of mind that I cannot hide anything from anyone. Mine is the condition of a child. Rakhal doesn't understand it. He covers my injured arm, wrapping my body with a cloth lest others should see my injury and criticize me. He took Dr. Madhu aside and reported my illness. But I shouted and said : 'Hello ! Where are you, Madhusudan ? Come and see. My arm is broken !'

"I used to sleep in the same room with Mathur and his wife. They took care of me as if I were their own child. I was then passing through a state of divine madness. Mathur would ask me, 'Father, do you hear our conversation ?' 'Yes', I would reply.

"Once Mathur's wife became suspicious of his movements and said to him, 'If you go anywhere, he must accompany you.' One day Mathur went to a certain place and asked me to wait downstairs. He returned after half an hour and said to me : 'Come, father, let us go now. The carriage is waiting.' When Mathur's wife asked me about it, I reported the thing correctly. I said to her : 'We went to a certain house. He told me to stay downstairs and himself went upstairs. He came down after half an hour and we left the place.' Of course she understood the thing in her own way.

"A partner of Mathur's estate used to take fruits and vegetables stealthily from the temple garden. When the other partners asked me about it, I told them the exact truth."

Sunday, February 24, 1884

Sri Ramakrishna was resting in his room after his midday meal, and Mani Mallick was sitting on the floor beside him, when M. arrived. M. saluted

* The Master.

the Master and sat down beside Mani. The Master's injured arm was bandaged.

MASTER (*to M.*) : "How did you come?"

M : "I came as far as Alambazar in a carriage and from there I walked."

MANILAL : "Oh, he is so hot!"

MASTER (*with a smile*) : "This makes me think that all these are not mere fancies of my brain. Otherwise why should these 'Englishmen' take so much trouble to come here?"

Sri Ramakrishna began to talk to them about his health and his injured arm.

MASTER : "Now and then I become impatient about my arm. I show it to this or that man and ask him whether I shall get well again. That makes Rakhal angry. He doesn't understand my mood. Now and then I say to myself, 'Let him go away.' Again I say to the Mother : 'Mother, where will he go? Why should he burn himself in the frying-pan of the world?'

"This childlike impatience of mine is nothing new. I used to ask Mathur Babu to feel my pulse and tell me whether I was ill.

"Well, where then is my faith in God? Once I was going to Kamar-pukur in a bullock-cart, when several persons came up to the cart with clubs in their hands. They looked like highwaymen. I began to chant the names of the gods. Sometimes I repeated the names of Rama and Durga, and sometimes 'Om Tat Sat', so that in case one failed another would work.

(*To M.*) "Can you tell me why I am so impatient?"

M : "Your mind, sir, is always absorbed in samadhi. You have kept a fraction of it on your body for the welfare of the devotees. Therefore you feel impatient now and then for your body's safety."

MASTER : "That is true. A little of the mind is attached to the body. It wants to enjoy the love of God and the company of the devotees."

Mani Mallick told the Master about an exhibition that was being held in Calcutta. He described a beautiful image of Yasoda with the Baby Krishna on her lap. Sri Ramakrishna's eyes filled with tears. On hearing about Yasoda, the embodiment of maternal love, his spiritual consciousness was kindled and he wept.

MANILAL : "If you were not unwell, you could visit the exhibition in the Maidan."

MASTER (*To M. and the others*) : "I shan't be able to see everything even if I go. Perhaps my eyes will fall on some certain thing and I shall become unconscious. Then I shall not be able to see the rest. I was taken to the Zoological Garden. I went into samadhi at the sight of the lion, for the carrier⁶ of the Mother awakened in my mind the consciousness of the Mother Herself. In that state who could see the other animals? I had to return home after seeing only the lion. Hence Jadu Mallick's mother first suggested that I should go to the exhibition and then said I should not."

Mani Mallick, about sixty-five years old, had been a member of the Brahmo Samaj for many years, and Sri Ramakrishna gave him instruction that would agree with his mood.

⁶ In Hindu mythology the lion is the carrier of Durga, the Divine Mother.

MASTER : "Pundit Jaynarayan had very liberal views. I visited him once and liked his attitude. But his sons wore high boots. He told me he intended to go to Benares and live there, and at last he carried out his intention ; for later on he did live in Benares and die there. When one grows old one should retire, like Jaynarayan, and devote oneself to the thought of God. What do you say ?"

MANILAL : "True, sir. I don't relish the worries and troubles of the world."

MASTER : "Gauri used to worship his wife with offerings of flowers. All women are manifestations of the Divine Mother. (*To Manilal*) Please tell them that little story of yours."

MANILAL (*smiling*) : "Once several men were crossing the Ganges in a boat. One of them, a pundit, was making a great display of his erudition, saying that he had studied various books—the Vedas, the Vedanta, and the six systems of philosophy. He asked a fellow passenger, 'Do you know the Vedanta?' 'No, revered sir.' 'The Samkhya and the Patanjala?' 'No, revered sir.' 'Have you read no philosophy whatsoever?' 'No, revered sir.' The pundit was talking in this vain way and the passenger sitting in silence, when a great storm arose and the boat was about to sink. The passenger said to the pundit, 'Sir, can you swim?' 'No', replied the pundit. The passenger said, 'I don't know the Samkhya or the Patanjala, but I can swim.'

MASTER (*smiling*) : "What will a man gain by knowing many scriptures? The one thing needful is to know how to cross the river of the world. God alone is real, and all else illusory."

"While Arjuna was aiming his arrow at the eye of the bird, Drona asked him : 'What do you see? Do you see these kings?' 'No, sir', replied Arjuna. 'Do you see me?' 'No.' 'The tree?' 'No.' 'The bird on the tree?' 'No.' 'What do you see then?' 'Only the eye of the bird.'

"He who sees only the eye of the bird can hit the mark. He alone is clever who sees that God is real and all else is illusory. What need have I of other information? Hanuman once remarked : 'I don't know anything about the phase of the moon or the position of the stars. I only contemplate Rama.'

(*To M.*) "Please buy a few fans for our use here."

(*To Manilal*) "Look here, pay a visit to his [meaning M.'s] father. The sight of a devotee will inspire you."

(*To M.*) "Since my arm was injured a deep change has come over me. I now delight only in the Naralila, the human manifestation of God. Nitya and Lila. The Nitya is the Indivisible Satchidananda, and the Lila, or Sport, takes various forms, such as the Lila as God, the Lila as the deities, the Lila as man, and the Lila as the universe."

"Vaishnavcharan used to say that one has attained Perfect Knowledge if one believes in God sporting as man. I wouldn't admit it then. But now I realize that he was right. Vaishnavcharan liked pictures of man expressing tenderness and love."

(*To Manilal*) "It is God Himself who is sporting in the form of man. It is He alone who has become Mani Mallick. The Sikhs teach : 'Thou art Satchidananda.'

"Now and then man catches a glimpse of his real Self and becomes speechless with wonder. At such times he swims in an ocean of joy. It is like suddenly meeting a dear relative. (*To M.*) The other day as I was coming here in a carriage, I felt like that at the sight of Baburam. When Siva realizes His own Self, He dances about in joy exclaiming, 'What am I ! What am I !'

"The same thing has been described in the *Adhyatma Ramayana*. Narada said, 'O Rama, all men are Thy forms, and it is Sita who has become all women.' On looking at the actors in the Ramlila, I felt that Narayana Himself had taken these human forms. The genuine and the imitation appeared to be the same.

"Why do people worship virgins ? All women are so many forms of the Divine Mother. But Her manifestation is greatest in pure-souled virgins.

(*To M.*) "Why do I become impatient when I am ill ? Because the Mother has placed me in the state of a child. The child depends entirely on its mother. The child of the maid-servant, when he quarrels with the child of the master, says, 'I shall tell my mother.'

"I was taken to Radhabazar to be photographed. It had been arranged that I should go to Rajendra Mitra's house that day. I heard that Keshab would be there. I planned to tell them certain things, but I forgot it all when I went to Radhabazar. I said : 'O Mother, Thou wilt speak. What shall I say ?

"I have not the nature of a jnani. He considers himself great. He says, 'What ? How can I be ill ?'

"Koar Singh once said to me, 'You still worry about your body.' But it is my nature to believe that my Mother knows everything. It was She who would speak at Rajendra Mitra's house. Hers are the only effective words. One ray of light from the Goddess of Wisdom stuns a thousand scholars.

"The Mother has kept me in the state of a bhakta, a vijnani. That is why I joke with Rakhal and the others. Had I been in the condition of a jnani I couldn't do that.

"In this state I realize that it is the Mother alone who has become everything. I see Her everywhere. In the Kali temple I found that the Mother Herself had become everything—even the wicked, even the brother of Bhagavat Pundit.

"Once I was about to scold Ramlal's mother, but I had to restrain myself. I saw her to be a form of the Divine Mother. I worship virgins because I see in them the Divine Mother. My wife strokes my feet, but I salute her afterwards.

"You salute me by touching my feet. But had Hriday been here, who would have dared to touch them ? He wouldn't have allowed anyone to do it. I have to return your salutes because the Mother has placed me in a state in which I see God in everything.

"You see, one cannot exclude even a wicked person. A tulsi-leaf, however dry or small, can be used for worship in the temple."

Sunday, March 2, 1884

Sri Ramakrishna was sitting on the small couch in his room, listening to devotional music by Trailokya Sannyal of the Brahmo Samaj. He had not yet recovered from the effects of the injury to his arm, which was still supported by a splint. Many devotees, including Narendra, Surendra, and M., were sitting on the floor.

Narendra's father, a lawyer of the High Court of Calcutta, had passed away suddenly. He had not been able to make provision for the family, which consequently faced grave financial difficulties. The members of the family sometimes had to go without food. Narendra was therefore passing his days in great anxiety.

Trailokya sang about the Divine Mother :

O Mother, I hide myself in Thy loving bosom ;
 I gaze at Thy face and cry out, "Mother ! Mother !" "
 I sink in the Sea of Bliss and am lost to sense
 In yoga-sleep ; I gaze with unwinking eyes
 Upon Thy face, powerless to turn away.
 O Mother, I am terrified by this world ;
 My spirit trembles and cries out in fear.
 Keep me, sweet Mother, in Thy loving bosom ;
 Cover me with the spreading skirt of thy love.

The Master shed tears of love and cried out, "Ah me ! Ah me !"

Trailokya sang again :

O Lord, Destroyer of my shame ! Who but Thyself can save
 The honour of Thy devotee ?
 Thou art the Ruler of my soul, my very life's Support,
 And I am Thy slave for evermore. . . .

He continued :

Seeking a shelter at Thy feet,
 I have for ever set aside
 My pride of caste and race, O Lord,
 And turned my back on fear and shame.
 A lonely pilgrim on life's way,
 Where shall I go for succour now ?
 For Thy sake, Lord, I bear men's blame ;
 They rail at me with bitter words
 And hate me for my love of Thee.

Both friends and strangers use me ill.
 Thou art the Guardian of my name ;
 Thou mayest save or slay me, Lord !
 Upon the honour of Thy servant
 Rests, O Lord, Thy name as well ;
 Thou art the Ruler of my soul,
 The glow of love within my heart ;
 Do with me as it pleases Thee !

Once more he sang :

Lord, Thou hast taken me from home and made me captive with
 Thy love ;

Shield me for ever at Thy feet, O Thou Beloved One !
 Upon the Nectar of Thy love, feed me both day and night,
 And save Premdas, who is Thy slave.

The Master again shed tears of joy. He sang some lines from a song of Ramprasad :

Glory and shame, bitter and sweet, are Thine alone ;
 This world is nothing but Thy play.
 Then why, O Blissful One, dost Thou cause a rift in it ?

Addressing Trailokya, the Master said : "Ah ! How touching your songs are ! They are genuine. Only he who has gone to the ocean can fetch its water."

Trailokya sang again :

Thou it is that dancest, Lord, and Thou that singest the song ;
 Thou it is that clappest Thy hands in time with the music's beat ;
 But man, who is an onlooker merely, foolishly thinks it is he.

Though but a puppet, man becomes a god if he moves with Thee
 Thou art the Mover of the machine, the Driver of the car ;
 But man is weighted down with woe, dreaming that he is free.

Thou art the Root of everything, Thou the Soul of our souls ;
 Thou art the Master of our hearts ; through Thine unbounded grace
 Thou turnest even the meanest sinner into the mightiest saint.

The singing came to an end. The Master engaged in conversation with the devotees.

MASTER : "God alone is the Master, and again, He is the Servant. This attitude indicates Perfect Knowledge. At first one discriminates, 'Not this, not this', and feels that God alone is real and all else is illusory. Afterwards the same person finds that it is God Himself who has become all this—the universe, maya, and the living beings. First negation and then affirmation. This is the view held by the Puranas. A bel-fruit, for instance, includes flesh, seeds, and shell. You get the flesh by discarding the shell and seeds. But if you want to know the weight of the fruit, you cannot find it if you discard the shell and seeds. Just so, one should attain Satchidananda by negating the universe and its living beings. But after the attainment of Satchidananda one finds that Satchidananda Itself has become the universe and the living beings. It is of one substance that the flesh and the shell and seeds are made, just like butter and buttermilk.

"It may be asked, 'How has Satchidananda become so hard ?' This earth does indeed feel very hard to the touch. The answer is that blood and semen are thin liquids, and yet out of them comes such a big creature as man. Everything is possible for God. First of all reach the indivisible Satchidananda, and then, coming down, look at the universe. You will then find that everything is Its manifestation. It is God alone who has become everything. The world by no means exists apart from Him.

"All elements finally merge in akasa. Again, at the time of creation, akasa evolves into mahat and mahat into ahamkara. In this way the whole

world-system is evolved. It is the process of involution and evolution. A devotee of God accepts everything. He accepts the universe and its created beings as well as the indivisible Satchidananda.

"But the yogi's path is different. He does not come back after reaching the Paramatman, the Supreme Soul. He becomes united with It.

The 'partial knower' limits God to one object only. He thinks that God cannot exist in anything beyond that.

"There are three classes of devotees. The lowest one says, 'God is up there.' That is, he points to heaven. The mediocre devotee says that God dwells in the heart as the 'Inner Controller'. But the highest devotee says: 'God alone has become everything. All that we perceive is so many forms of God.' Narendra used to make fun of me and say: 'Yes, God has become all! Then a pot is God, a cup is God!' (Laughter.)

"All doubts disappear when one sees God. It is one thing to hear of God, but quite a different thing to see Him. A man cannot have one hundred per cent conviction through mere hearing. But if he beholds God face to face, then he is wholly convinced.

"Formal worship drops away after the vision of God. It was thus that my worship in the temple came to an end. I used to worship the Deity in the Kali temple. It was suddenly revealed to me that everything is Pure Spirit. The utensils of worship, the altar, the door-frame—all Pure Spirit. Men, animals, and other living beings—all Pure Spirit. Then like a madman I began to shower flowers in all directions. Whatever I saw I worshipped.

"One day, while worshipping Siva, I was about to offer a bel-leaf on the head of the image, when it was revealed to me that this Virat, this Universe, itself is Siva. After that my worship of Siva through the image came to an end. Another day I had been plucking flowers, when it was revealed to me that the flowering plants were so many bouquets."

TRAILOKYA : "Ah! How beautiful is God's creation!"

MASTER : "Oh no, it is not that. It was revealed to me in a flash. I didn't calculate about it. It has shown to me that each plant was a bouquet adorning the Universal Form of God. That was the end of my plucking flowers. I look on man in just the same way. When I see a man, I see that it is God Himself who walks on earth, as it were, rocking to and fro, like a pillow floating on the waves. The pillow moves with the waves. It bobs up and down.

"The body has, indeed, only a momentary existence. God alone is real. Now the body exists, and now it does not. Years ago, when I had been suffering terribly from indigestion, Hriday said to me, 'Do ask the Mother to cure you.' I felt ashamed to speak to Her about my illness. I said to Her: 'Mother, I saw a skeleton in the Asiatic Society Museum. It was pieced together with wires into a human form. O Mother, please keep my body together a little, like that, so that I may sing Thy name and glories.'

"Why this desire to live? After Ravana's death Rama and Lakshmana entered his capital and saw Nikasha, his old mother, running away. Lakshmana was surprised at this and said to Rama, 'All her children are dead, but still life attracts her so much!' Rama called Nikasha to His side

and said : 'Don't be afraid. Why are you running away ?' She replied : 'Rama, it was not fear that made me flee from You. I have been able to see all these wondrous actions of Yours simply because I am alive. I shall see many more things like these if I continue to live. Hence I desire to live.'

"Without desires the body cannot live. (*Smiling*) I had one or two desires. I prayed to the Mother, 'O Mother, give me the company of those who have renounced "woman and gold".' I said further : 'I should like to enjoy the society of Thy jnanis and bhaktas. So give me a little strength that I may walk hither and thither and visit those people.' But She did not give me the strength to walk."

TRAILOKYA (*smiling*) : "Have all the desires been fulfilled ?"

MASTER (*smiling*) : "No, there are still a few left. (*All laugh.*)

"The body is really impermanent. When my arm was broken I said to the Mother, 'Mother, it hurts me very much.' At once She revealed to me a carriage and its driver. Here and there a few screws were loose. The carriage moved as the driver directed it. It had no power of its own.

"Why then do I take care of the body ? It is to enjoy God, to sing His name and glories, and to go about visiting His jnanis and bhaktas."

Narendra was sitting on the floor in front of the Master.

MASTER (*to Trailokya and the other devotees*) : "The joys and sorrows of the body are inevitable. Look at Narendra. His father is dead, and his people have been put to extreme suffering. He can't find any way out of it. God places one sometimes in happiness and sometimes in misery."

TRAILOKYA : "Revered sir, God will be gracious to Narendra."

MASTER (*with a smile*) : "But when ? It is true that no one starves at the temple of Annapurna in Benares ; but some must wait for food till evening.

"Once Hriday asked Sambhu Mallick for some money. Sambhu held the views of 'Englishmen' on such matters. He said to Hriday : 'Why should I give you money ? You can earn your livelihood by working. Even now you are earning something. The case of a very poor person is different. The purpose of charity is fulfilled if one gives money to the blind or the lame.' Thereupon Hriday said : 'Sir, please don't say that. I don't need your money. May God help me not to become blind or deaf or extremely poor ! I don't want you to give, and I don't want to receive.'"

The Master spoke as if piqued because God had not yet shown His kindness to Narendra. Now and then he cast an affectionate glance at his beloved disciple.

NARENDRA : "I am now studying the views of the atheists."

MASTER : "There are two doctrines : the existence and the non-existence of God. Why don't you accept the first ?"

SURENDRA : "God is just. He must look after His devotees."

MASTER : "It is said in the scriptures that only those who have been charitable in their former births get money in this life. But to tell you the truth, this world is God's maya. And there are many confusing things in this realm of maya. One cannot comprehend them."

"The ways of God are inscrutable indeed. Bhishma lay on his bed of arrows. The Pandava brothers visited him in Krishna's company. Presently Bhishma burst into tears. The Pandavas said to Krishna : 'Krishna, how amazing this is ! Our grandsire Bhishma is one of the eight Vasus. Another man as wise as he is not to be found. Yet even he is bewildered by maya and weeps at death.' 'But', said Krishna, 'Bhishma isn't weeping on that account. You may ask him about it.' When asked, Bhishma said : 'O Krishna, I am unable to understand anything of the ways of God. God Himself is the constant companion of the Pandavas, and still they have no end of trouble. That is why I weep. When I reflect on this, I realize that one cannot understand anything of God's ways.'

"God has revealed to me that only the Paramatman, whom the Vedas describe as the Pure Soul, is as immutable as Mount Sumeru, unattached, and beyond pain and pleasure. There is much confusion in this world of His maya. One can by no means say that 'this' will come after 'that' or 'this' will produce 'that'."

SURENDRA (*smiling*) : "If by giving away money in a previous birth one gets wealth in this life, then we should all give away money now."

MASTER : "Those who have money should give it to the poor and needy. (*To Trailokya*) Jaygopal Sen is well-to-do. He should be charitable. That he is not so is to his discredit. There are some who are miserly even though they have money. There is no knowing who will enjoy their money afterwards.

"Jaygopal came here the other day. He drove over here in a carriage. The lamps were broken, the horse seemed to have been returned from the charnel-house, and the coachman looked as if he had just been discharged from the Medical College Hospital. And he brought me two rotten pomegranates !" (*All laugh.*)

SURENDRA : "Jaygopal Babu belongs to the Brahmo Samaj. I understand that now there is not one worth-while man in Keshab's organization. Vijay Goswami, Shivanath, and other notables have organized the Sadharan Brahmo Samaj."

MASTER (*smiling*) : "Govinda Adhikari, it is said, would not keep good actors in his theatre lest they should claim a share of the profit. (*All laugh.*)

"The other day I saw a disciple of Keshab. A theatrical performance was being given in Keshab's house, and I saw the disciple dancing on the stage with a child in his arms. I understand that this man delivers 'lectures'. He had better lecture to himself."

Trailokya sang :

Upon the Sea of Blissful Awareness waves of ecstatic love arise :
Rapture divine ! Play of God's Bliss !
Oh, how entralling !
Wondrous waves of the sweetness of God, ever new and ever
enchanting,
Rise on the surface, ever assuming
Forms ever fresh.

Then once more in the Great Communion all are merged, as
the barrier walls
Of time and space dissolve and vanish :
Dance then, O mind !
Dance in delight, with hands upraised, chanting Lord Hari's
holy name.

Sri Ramakrishna requested Trailokya to sing the song beginning, "O Mother, make me mad with Thy love".

Trailokya sang :

O Mother make me mad with Thy love !
What need have I of knowledge or reason ?
Make me drunk with Thy love's Wine :
O Thou who stealest Thy bhaktas' hearts,
Drown me deep in the Sea of Thy love !
Here in this world, this madhouse of Thine,
Some laugh, some weep, some dance for joy :
Jesus, Buddha, Moses, Gauranga,
All are drunk with the Wine of Thy love.
O Mother when shall I be blessed
By joining their blissful company ?

XX

RULES FOR HOUSEHOLDERS AND MONKS

Sunday, March 9, 1884

SRI RAMAKRISHNA was sitting in his room at Dakshineswar with many devotees. Among them were Mani Mallick, Mahendra Kaviraj, Balaram, M., Bhavanath, Rakhal, Latu, and Harish. The Master's injured arm was in a splint. In spite of the injury he was constantly absorbed in samadhi or instructing the devotees.

Mani Mallick and Bhavanath referred to the exhibition which was then being held near the Asiatic Museum. They said : "Many maharajas have sent precious articles to the exhibition—gold couches and the like. It is worth seeing."

MASTER (*to the devotees, with a smile*) : "Yes, you gain much by visiting those things. You realize that those articles of gold and the other things sent by maharajas are mere trash. That is a great gain in itself. When I used to go to Calcutta with Hriday, he would show me the Viceroy's palace and say : 'Look, uncle ! There is the Viceroy's palace with the big columns.' The Mother revealed to me that they were merely clay bricks laid one on top of another.

"God and His splendour. God alone is real ; the splendour has but a two-days' existence. The magician and his magic. All become speechless with wonder at the magic, but it is all unreal. The magician alone is real. The rich man and his garden. People see only the garden ; they should look for its rich owner."

MANI MALICK (*to the Master*) : "What a big electric light they have at the exhibition ! It makes us think how great He must be who has made such an electric light."

MASTER (*to Mani*) : "But according to one view it is He Himself who has become everything. Even those who say that are He. It is Satchidananda Itself that has become all—the Creator, maya, the universe, and living beings."

The conversation turned to the museum.

MASTER (*to the devotees*) : "I visited the museum once. I was shown fossils. A whole animal has become stone ! Just see what an effect has been produced by company ! Likewise, by constantly living in the company of a holy man one verily becomes holy."



MANI (*smiling*) : "Had you visited the exhibition only once, we could receive instruction for ten or fifteen years."

MASTER (*with a smile*) : "How so ? You mean illustrations ? "

BALARAM : "No, you shouldn't go. Your arm won't heal if you go here and there."

MASTER : "I should like to have two pictures. One of a yogi seated before a lighted log, and another of a yogi smoking hemp and the charcoal blazing up as he pulls. Such pictures kindle my spiritual consciousness, as an imitation fruit awakens the idea of a real one.

"The obstacle to yoga is 'woman and gold'. Yoga is possible when the mind becomes pure. The seat of the mind is between the eyebrows ; but its look is fixed on the navel and the organs of generation and evacuation, that is to say, on 'woman and gold'. But through spiritual discipline the same mind looks upward.

"What are the spiritual disciplines that give the mind its upward direction ? One learns all this by constantly living in holy company. The rishis of olden times lived either in solitude or in the company of holy persons ; therefore they could easily renounce 'woman and gold' and fix their minds on God. They had no fear nor did they mind the criticism of others.

"In order to be able to renounce, one must pray to God for the will-power to do so. One must immediately renounce what one feels to be unreal. The rishis had this will-power. Through it they controlled the sense-organs. If the tortoise once tucks in its limbs, you cannot make it bring them out even by cutting it into four pieces.

"The worldly man is a hypocrite. He cannot be guileless. He professes to love God, but he is attracted by worldly objects. He doesn't give God even a very small part of the love he feels for 'woman and gold'. But he says that he loves God. (*To Mani Mallick*) Give up hypocrisy."

MANI : "Regarding whom, God or man ? "

MASTER : "Regarding everything—man as well as God. One must not be a hypocrite.

"How guileless Bhavanath is ! After his marriage he came to me and asked, 'Why do I feel so much love for my wife ?' Alas, he is so guileless !

"Isn't it natural for a man to love his wife ? This is due to the world-bewitching maya of the Divine Mother of the Universe. A man feels about his wife that he has no one else in the world so near and dear ; that she is his very own in life and death, here and hereafter.

"Again, how much a man suffers for his wife ! Still he believes that there is no other relative so near. Look at the sad plight of a husband. Perhaps he earns twenty rupees a month and is the father of three children. He hasn't the means to feed them well. His roof leaks, but he hasn't the wherewithal to repair it. He cannot afford to buy new books for his son. He cannot invest his son with the sacred thread. He begs a few pennies from his different friends.

"But a wife endowed with spiritual wisdom is a real partner in life. She greatly helps her husband to follow the religious path. After the birth of

one or two children they live like brother and sister. Both of them are devotees of God—His servant and His handmaid. Their family is a spiritual family. They are always happy with God and His devotees. They know that God alone is their own, from everlasting to everlasting. They are like the Pandava brothers ; they do not forget God in happiness or in sorrow.

"The longing of the worldly-minded for God is momentary, like a drop of water on a red-hot frying-pan. The water hisses and dries up in an instant. The attention of the worldly-minded is directed to the enjoyment of worldly pleasure. Therefore they do not feel yearning and restlessness for God.

"People may observe the ekadasi in three ways. First, the 'waterless' ekadasi—they are not permitted to drink even a drop of water. Likewise, an all-renouncing religious mendicant completely gives up all forms of enjoyment. Second, while observing the ekadasi they take milk and sandesh. Likewise, a householder devotee keeps in his house simple objects of enjoyment. Third, while observing the ekadasi they eat luchi and chakka. They eat their fill. They keep a couple of loaves soaking in milk, which they will eat later on.¹

"A man practises spiritual discipline, but his mind is on 'woman and gold'—it is turned toward enjoyment. Therefore, in his case, the spiritual discipline does not produce the right result.

"Hazra used to practise much japa and austerity here. But in the country he has his wife, children, and land. Therefore along with his spiritual discipline he carried on the business of a broker. Such people cannot be true to their word. One moment they say they will give up fish, but the next moment they break their vow.

"Is there anything that a man will not do for money ? He will even compel a brahmin or a holy man to carry a load.

"In my room sweets would turn bad : still I could not give them away to the worldly-minded. I could accept dirty water from others, but not even touch the jar of a worldly person.

"At the sight of rich people Hazra would call them to him. He would give them long lectures. He would say to them : ' You see Rakhal and the other youngsters. They do not practise any spiritual discipline. They simply wander about merrily.'

"A man may live in a mountain cave, smear his body with ashes, observe fasts, and practise austere discipline ; but if his mind dwells on worldly objects, on 'woman and gold', I say, 'Shame on him !' But I say that a man is blessed indeed who eats, drinks, and roams about, but who keeps his mind free from 'woman and gold'.

(Pointing to Mani Mallick) "There is no picture of a holy man at his house. Divine feeling is awakened through such pictures."

MANILAL : "Yes, there is. In one room there is a picture of a pious Christian woman engaged in prayer. There is another picture in which a man holds

¹ This observance is an ekadasi in name only, since the observer fills his stomach with delicious food. By avoiding rice and a few cooked articles, he keeps to the letter of the law.

to the Hill of Faith ; below is an ocean of immeasurable depth. If he gives up his hold on faith, he will drop into the bottomless water. There is still a third picture. Several virgins are keeping vigil, feeding their lamps with oil in expectation of the Bridegroom. A sleeping virgin is by their side. She will not behold the Bridegroom when He arrives. God is described here as the Bridegroom."

MASTER (*smiling*) : "That's very nice."

MANILAL "I have other pictures too—one of the 'Tree of Faith' and another of 'Sin and Virtue'."

MASTER (*to Bhavanath*) : "Those are good pictures. Go to his house and see them."

The Master remained silent a few minutes.

MASTER : "Now and then I reflect on these ideas and find that I do not like them. In the beginning of spiritual life a man should think about sin and how to get rid of it. But when, through the grace of God, devotion and ecstatic love are awakened in his heart, then he altogether forgets virtue and sin. Then he leaves the scriptures and their injunctions far behind. Thoughts of repentance and penance do not bother him at all.

"It is like going to your destination along a winding river. This requires great effort and a long time. But when there is a flood all around, then you can go straight to your destination in a short time. Then you find the land lying under water deep as a bamboo pole.

"In the beginning of spiritual life one goes by a roundabout way. One has to suffer a great deal. But the path becomes very easy when ecstatic love is awakened in the heart. It is like going over the paddy-field after the harvest is over. You may then walk in any direction. Before the harvest you had to go along the winding balk, but now you can walk in any direction. There may be stubble in the field, but you will not be hurt by it if you walk with your shoes on. Just so, an aspirant does not suffer if he has discrimination, dispassion, and faith in the guru's words."

MANILAL (*to the Master*) : "Well, what is the rule for concentration ? Where should one concentrate ?"

MASTER : "The heart is a splendid place. One can meditate there or in the Sahasrara. These are rules for meditation given in the scriptures. But you may meditate wherever you like. Every place is filled with Brahman-Consciousness. Is there any place where It does not exist ? Narayana, in Vali's presence, covered with two steps the heavens, the earth, and the interspaces.² Is there then any place left uncovered by God ? A dirty place is as holy as the bank of the Ganges. It is said that the whole creation is the Virat, the Universal Form of God.

"There are two kinds of meditation, one on the formless God and the other on God with form. But meditation on the formless God is extremely

² A reference to a story in the *Bhagavata*. King Vali was proud of his charity. God appeared before him in the form of a dwarf and asked him for the space that He could cover with three steps. Vali granted the boon. With two steps the Lord covered the earth, the heavens, and the interspaces. Vali was forced to place his own head before the Lord for the third step. This curbed his pride.

difficult. In that meditation you must wipe out all that you see or hear. You contemplate only the nature of your Inner Self. Meditating on His Inner Self, Siva dances about. He exclaims, 'What am I! What am I!' This is called the 'Siva yoga'. While practising this form of meditation, one directs one's look to the forehead. It is meditation on the nature of one's Inner Self after negating the world, following the Vedantic method of 'Neti, neti'.

"There is another form of meditation known as the 'Vishnu yoga'. The eyes are fixed on the tip of the nose. Half the look is directed inward and the other half outward. This is how one meditates on God with form. Sometimes Siva meditates on God with form, and dances. At that time he exclaims, 'Rama! Rama!' and dances about."

Sri Ramakrishna then explained the sacred Word "Om" and the true Knowledge of Brahman and the state of mind after the attainment of Brahmajnana.

MASTER : "The sound Om is Brahman. The rishis and sages practised austerity to realize that Sound-Brahman. After attaining perfection one hears the sound of this eternal Word rising spontaneously from the navel.

"'What will you gain', some sages ask, 'by merely hearing this sound?' You hear the roar of the ocean from a distance. By following the roar you can reach the ocean. As long as there is the roar, there must also be the ocean. By following the trail of Om you attain Brahman, of which the Word is the symbol. That Brahman has been described by the Vedas as the ultimate goal. But such vision is not possible as long as you are conscious of your ego. A man realizes Brahman only when he feels neither 'I' nor 'you', neither 'one' nor 'many'.

"Think of the sun and of ten jars filled with water. The sun is reflected in each jar. At first you see one real sun and ten reflected ones. If you break nine of the jars, there will remain only the real sun and one reflection. Each jar represents a jiva. Following the reflection one can find the real sun. Through the individual soul one can reach the Supreme Soul. Through spiritual discipline the individual soul can get the vision of the Supreme Soul. What remains when the last jar is broken cannot be described.

"The jiva at first remains in a state of ignorance. He is not conscious of God, but of the multiplicity. He sees many things around him. On attaining Knowledge he becomes conscious that God dwells in all beings. Suppose a man has a thorn in the sole of his foot. He gets another thorn and takes out the first one. In other words, he removes the thorn of ajnana, ignorance, by means of the thorn of jnana, knowledge. But on attaining vijnana, he discards both thorns, knowledge and ignorance. Then he talks intimately with God day and night. It is no mere vision of God.

"He who has merely heard of milk is 'ignorant'. He who has seen milk has 'knowledge'. But he who has drunk milk and been strengthened by it has attained vijnana."

Thus the Master described his own state of mind to the devotees. He was indeed a vijnani.

U.L.T.

MASTER (*to the devotees*) : "There is a difference between a sadhu endowed with jnana and one endowed with vijnana. The jnani sadhu has a certain way of sitting. He twirls his moustache and asks the visitor, 'Well, sir ! Have you any question to ask ?' But the man who always sees God and talks to Him intimately has an altogether different nature. He is sometimes like an inert thing, sometimes like a ghoul, sometimes like a child, and sometimes like a madman.

"When he is in samadhi, he becomes unconscious of the outer world and appears inert. He sees everything to be full of Brahman-Consciousness ; therefore he behaves like a ghoul. He is not conscious of the holy and the unholy. He does not observe any formal purity. To him everything is Brahman. He is not aware of filth as such. Even rice and other cooked food after a few days become like filth.

"Again, he is like a madman. People notice his ways and actions and think of him as insane. Or sometimes he is like a child—no bondage, no shame, no hatred, no hesitation, or the like.

"One reaches this state of mind after having the vision of God. When a boat passes by a magnetic hill, its screws and nails become loose and drop out. Lust, anger, and the other passions cannot exist after the vision of God.

"Once a thunderbolt struck the Kali temple. I noticed that it flattened the points of the screws.

"It is no longer possible for the man who has seen God to beget children and perpetuate the creation. When a grain of paddy is sown it grows into a plant ; but a grain of boiled paddy does not germinate.

"He who has seen God retains his 'I' only in name. No evil can be done by that 'I'. It is a mere appearance, like the mark left on the coconut tree by its branch. The branch has fallen off. Only the mark remains.

"I said to Keshab Sen, 'Give up the ego that makes you feel, "I am the doer ; I am teaching people." ' Keshab said to me, 'Sir, then I cannot keep the organization.' Thereupon I said to him, 'Give up the "wicked ego".' One doesn't have to renounce the ego that makes one feel, 'I am the servant of God ; I am His devotee.' One doesn't develop the 'divine ego' as long as one retains the 'wicked ego'. If a man is in charge of the store-room, the master of the house doesn't feel responsible for it.

(*To the devotees*) "You see, my nature is changing on account of this injury to my arm. It is being revealed to me that there is a greater manifestation of God in man than in other created beings. God is telling me, as it were : 'I dwell in men. Be merry with men.' Among men God manifests Himself in a still greater degree in pure-souled devotees. That is why I feel great longing for Narendra, Rakhal, and other such youngsters.

"One often sees small holes along the edge of a lake. Fish and crabs accumulate there. Just so, there is a greater accumulation of divinity in man. It is said that man is greater than the salagram. Man is Narayana Himself. If God can manifest Himself through an image, then why not through man also ?

"God is born as man for the purpose of sporting as man. Rama, Krishna, and Chaitanya are examples. By meditating on an Incarnation of God one meditates on God Himself."

Bhagavan Das, a Brahmo devotee, arrived.

MASTER (*to Bhagavan Das*) : "The Eternal Religion, the religion of the rishis, has been in existence from time out of mind and will exist eternally. There exist in this Sanatana Dharma all forms of worship—worship of God with form and worship of the Impersonal Deity as well. It contains all paths—the path of knowledge, the path of devotion, and so on. Other forms of religion, the modern cults, will remain for a few days and then disappear."

March 23, 1884

Sri Ramakrishna was sitting in his room after his midday meal, with Rakhal, Ram, and some other devotees. He was not quite well. The injured arm was still bandaged.

But in spite of his illness, his room was a veritable mart of joy and he the centre of it. Devotees thronged there daily to see the Master. Spiritual talk went on incessantly, and the very air of the room vibrated with bliss. Sometimes the Master would sing the name and glories of God, and sometimes he would go into samadhi, the devotees being amazed at the ease with which the Master freed himself from the consciousness of the body.

RAM : "There is talk of Narendra's marrying Mr. R. Mitra's daughter. Narendra has been offered a large dowry."

MASTER (*smiling*) : "Yes, Narendra may thus become a leader of society or something like that. He will be an outstanding man, whatever career he follows."

The Master did not much encourage the conversation about Narendra.

MASTER (*to Ram*) : "Well can you tell me why I become so impatient when I am ill? Sometimes I ask this man and sometimes that man how I may be cured. You see, one must either believe everyone or no one at all.

"It is God Himself who has become the physicians. Therefore one must believe all of them. But one cannot have faith in them if one thinks of them as mere men.

"Sambhu was fearfully delirious. Dr. Sarvadhikari said that the delirium was due to the strong medicine. Haladhari asked the doctor to feel his pulse. The doctor said : "Let me see your eyes. Oh, it is an enlargement of the spleen!" Haladhari said he had nothing of the sort. But Dr. Madhu gives good medicine."

RAM : "The medicine by itself does no good, though it greatly helps nature."

MASTER : "If that is so, why does opium cause constipation?"

Ram referred to Keshab Sen's death.

RAM : "You were quite right. You said that a gardener uncovers the roots of a good rose-plant so that it may absorb the dew and grow stronger and healthier. The words of a holy man have been fulfilled."

MASTER : "I don't know about that. I wasn't calculating when I said it. It is you who say that."

RAM : "The Brahmos have published something about you in their magazine."



MASTER : " Published about me ? Why ? Why should they write now ? I eat and drink and make merry. I don't know anything else.

" I once asked Keshab, ' Why have you written about me ? ' He said that it would bring people here. But man cannot teach by his own power. One cannot conquer ignorance without the power of God.

" At one time two men were engaged to wrestle. One of them was Hanuman Singh and the other a Mussalman from the Punjab. The Mussalman was a strong, stout man. He had eaten lustily of butter and meat for fifteen days before the day of the wrestling-match, and even on that day. All thought he would be the victor. Hanuman Singh, on the other hand, clad in a dirty cloth, had eaten sparingly for some days before the day of the match and devoted himself to repeating the holy name of Mahavir.³ On the day of the match he observed a complete fast. All thought that he would surely be defeated. But it was he who won, while the man who had feasted for fifteen days lost the fight.

" What is the use of printing and advertising ? He who teaches men gets his power from God. None but a man of renunciation can teach others. I am the greatest of all fools ! " (All laugh.)

A DEVOTEE : " Then how is it that the Vedas and the Vedanta, and many things besides, come out of your mouth ? "

MASTER (*smiling*) : " During my boyhood I could understand what the sadhus read at the Laha's house at Karnarpukur, although I would miss a little here and there. ■ ■ pundit speaks to me in Sanskrit I can follow him, but I cannot speak it myself.

" To realize God is the one goal of life. While aiming his arrow at the mark, Arjuna said, ' I see only the eye of the bird and nothing else—not the kings, not the trees, not even the bird itself.'

" The realization of God is enough for me. What does it matter if I don't know Sanskrit ?

" The grace of God falls alike on all His children, learned and illiterate—whosoever longs for Him. The father has the same love for all his children. Suppose a father has five children. One calls him ' Baba ', some ' Ba ', and some ' Pa '. These last cannot pronounce the whole word. Does the father love those who address him as ' Baba ' more than those who call him ' Pa ' ? The father knows that these last are simply too young to say ' Baba ' correctly.

" Since this injury to my arm a change has been coming over my mind. I have been feeling much inclined to the Naralila. It is God Himself who plays about as human beings. If God can be worshipped through a clay image, then why not through a man ?

" Once a merchant was shipwrecked. He floated to the shore of Ceylon, where Bibhishana was the king of the monsters. Bibhishana ordered his servants to bring the merchant to him. At the sight of him Bibhishana was overwhelmed with joy and said : ' Ah ! He looks like my Rama. The same human form ! ' He adorned the merchant with robes and jewels, and worshipped him. When I first heard this story, I felt such joy that I cannot describe it.

³ Mahavir, or Hunuman, is the patron deity of wrestlers.

"Vaishnavcharan said to me, 'If a person looks on his beloved as his Ishta, he finds it very easy to direct his mind to God.' The men and women of a particular sect¹ at Syambazar, near Kamarpukur, say to each other, 'Whom do you love?' 'I love so-and-so.' 'Then know him to be your God.' When I heard this, I said to them : 'That is not my way. I look on all women as my mother.' I found out that they talked big but led immoral lives. The women then asked me if they would have salvation. 'Yes,' I said, 'if you are absolutely faithful to one man and look on him as your God. But you cannot be liberated if you live with five men.'

RAM : "I understand that Kedar Babu has recently visited the Kartabhajas' place."

MASTER : "He gathers honey from various flowers. (*To Ram, Nityagopal, and the others*) If a devotee believes one hundred per cent that his Chosen Ideal is God, then he attains God and sees Him.

"People of bygone generations had tremendous faith. What faith Haladhari's father had ! Once he was on the way to his daughter's house when he noticed some beautiful flowers and bel-leaves. He gathered them for the worship of the Family Deity and walked back five or six miles to his own house.

"Once a theatrical troupe in the village was enacting the life of Rama. When Kaikeyi asked Rama to go into exile in the forest, Haladhari's father, who had been watching the performance, sprang up. He went to the actor who played Kaikeyi, crying out, 'You wretch!', and was about to burn the actor's face with a torch. He was a very pious man. After finishing his ablutions he would stand in the water and meditate on the Deity, reciting the invocation : 'I meditate on Thee, of red hue and four faces', while tears streamed down his cheeks.

"When my father walked along the lanes of the village wearing his wooden sandals, the shopkeepers would stand up out of respect and say, 'There he comes !' When he bathed in the Haldarpukur, the villagers would not have the courage to get into the water. Before bathing they would inquire if he had finished his bath.

"When my father chanted the name of Raghuvir, his chest would turn crimson. This also happened to me. When I saw the cows at Vrindavan returning from the pasture, I was transported into a divine mood and my body became red.

"Very strong was the faith of the people in those days. One hears that God used to dance then, taking the form of Kali, while the devotee clapped his hands keeping time."

A hathayogi was staying in the hut at the Panchavati. Ramprasanna, the son of Krishnakishore of Ariadaha, and several other men had become his devotees. The yogi needed twenty-five rupees a month for his milk and

¹ The reference is to certain minor sects of Vaishnavism, such as the Kartabhaja and the Navarasika which teach that men and women should live together in the relationship of love. Gradually they should idealize their love by looking upon each other as divine, eventually realizing that their physical love is also the love of God. This is very difficult to realize.

opium ; so Ramprasanna had requested Sri Ramakrishna to speak to his devotees about the yogi and get some money. The Master said to several devotees : " A hathayogi has come to the Panchavati. Go and visit him. See what sort of man he is."

A young man of twenty-seven or twenty-eight, known as Thakur Dada, entered the room with a few friends and saluted the Master. He lived at Baranagore and was the son of a brahmin pundit. He was practising the kathakata⁵ in order to earn money to meet his family's expenses. At one time he had been seized with the spirit of renunciation and had gone away from his family. Even now he practised spiritual discipline at home.

MASTER : " Have you come on foot ? Where do you live ? "

DADA : " Yes, sir, I have walked from home. I live at Baranagore."

MASTER : " Have you come here for any particular purpose ? "

DADA : " I have come here to visit you. I pray to God. But why do I suffer now and then from worries ? For a few days I feel very happy. Why do I feel restless afterwards ? "

MASTER : " I see. Things have not been fitted quite exactly. The machine works smoothly if the mechanic fits the cogs of the wheels correctly. In your case there is an obstruction somewhere."

DADA : " Yes, sir. That must be so."

MASTER : " Are you initiated ? "

DADA : " Yes, sir."

MASTER : " Do you have faith in your mantra ? "

A friend of Thakur Dada said that the latter could sing well. The Master asked him to sing.

Thakur Dada sang :

I shall become a yogi and dwell in Love's mountain cave ;
I shall be lost in yoga beside the Fountain-head of Bliss.
I shall appease my hunger for Knowledge with the fruit of Truth ;
I shall worship the feet of God with the flower of Dispassion.

I shall not seek a well to slake the burning thirst of my heart,
But I shall draw the water of Peace into the jar of my soul.
Drinking the glorious Nectar of Thy blessed Lotus Feet,
I shall both laugh and dance and weep and sing on the heights of Joy.

MASTER : " Ah, what a nice song ! ' Fountain-head of Bliss ' ! ' Fruit of Truth ' ! ' Laugh and dance and weep and sing ' ! Your song tastes very sweet to me. Why should you worry ?

" Pleasure and pain are inevitable in the life of the world. One suffers now and then from a little worry and trouble. A man living in a room full of soot cannot avoid being a little stained."

DADA : " Please tell me what I should do now."

MASTER : " Chant the name of Hari morning and evening, clapping your hands. Come once more when my arm is healed a bit."

⁵ The recital of stories from religious books, with appropriate music.

Mahimacharan entered the room and saluted the Master. Sri Ramakrishna said to him : " Ah ! He has sung a nice song. Please sing it again." Thakur Dada repeated the song.

MASTER (*to Mahima*) : " Please recite that verse, the one about devotion to Hari."

Mahimacharan recited, quoting from the *Narada Pancharatra* :

What need is there of penance if God is worshipped with love ?
 What is the use of penance if God is not worshipped with love ?
 What need is there of penance if God is seen within and without ?
 What is the use of penance if God is not seen within and without ?

MASTER : " Recite that part also—' Obtain from Him the love of God ' ." Mahima recited :

O Brahman ! O my child ! Cease from practising further penances.

Hasten to Sankara, the Ocean of Heavenly wisdom ;
 Obtain from Him the love of God, the pure love praised by devotees,

Which snaps in twain the shackles that bind you to the world.

MASTER : " Yes, Sankara will bestow the love of God."

MAHIMA : " One who is free from bondage is the eternal Siva."

MASTER : " Shame, hatred, fear, hesitation—these are the shackles. What do you say ? "

MAHIMA : " Yes, sir. And also the desire to conceal, and shrinking before praise."

MASTER : " There are two signs of knowledge. First, an unshakable buddhi. No matter how many sorrows, afflictions, dangers, and obstacles one may be faced with, one's mind does not undergo any change. It is like the blacksmith's anvil, which receives constant blows from the hammer and still remains unshaken. And second, manliness—very strong grit. If lust and anger injure a man, he must renounce them once for all. If a tortoise once tucks in its limbs, it won't put them out again though you may cut it into four pieces. (*To Thakur Dada and the others*) There are two kinds of renunciation : intense and feeble. Feeble renunciation is a slow process ; one moves in a slow rhythm. Intense renunciation is like the sharp edge of a razor. It cuts the bondage of maya easily and at once.

" One farmer labours for days to bring water from the lake to his field. But his efforts are futile because he has no grit. Another farmer, after labouring for two or three days, takes a vow and says, ' I will bring water into my field today, and not till then will I go home.' He puts aside all thought of his bath or his meal. He labours the whole day and feels great joy when in the evening he finds water entering his field with a murmuring sound. Then he goes home and says to his wife : ' Now give me some oil. I shall take my bath.' After finishing his bath and his meal he lies down to sleep with a peaceful mind.

" A certain woman said to her husband : ' So-and-so has developed a spirit of great dispassion for the world, but I don't see anything of the sort in

you. He has sixteen wives. He is giving them up one by one.' The husband, with a towel on his shoulder, was going to the lake for his bath. He said to his wife : ' You are crazy ! He won't be able to give up the world. Is it ever possible to renounce bit by bit ? I can renounce. Look ! Here I go.' He didn't stop even to settle his household affairs. He left home just as he was, the towel on his shoulder, and went away. That is intense renunciation.

" There is another kind of renunciation, called ' markatavairagya ', ' monkey renunciation ' : A man, harrowed by distress at home, puts on an ochre robe and goes away to Benares. For many days he does not send home any news of himself. Then he writes to his people : ' Don't be worried about me, I have got a job here.'

" There is always trouble in family life. The wife may be disobedient. Perhaps the husband earns only twenty rupees a month. He hasn't the means to perform the 'rice-eating ceremony' for his baby. He cannot educate his son. The house is dilapidated. The roof leaks and he hasn't the money to repair it.

" Therefore when the youngsters come here I ask them whether they have anyone at home. (*To Mahima*) Why should householders renounce the world ? What great troubles the wandering monks pass through ! The wife of a certain man said to him : ' You want to renounce the world ? Why ? You will have to beg morsels from eight different homes. But here you get all your food at one place. Isn't that nice ? '

" Wandering monks, while searching for a *sadavrata*,⁶ may have to go six miles out of their way. I have seen them travelling along the regular road after their pilgrimage to Puri and making a detour to find an eating-place.

" You are leading a householder's life. That is very good. It is like fighting from a fort. There are many disadvantages in fighting in an open field. So many dangers, too. Bullets may hit you.

" But one should spend some time in solitude and attain Knowledge. Then one can lead the life of a householder. Janaka lived in the world after attaining Knowledge. When you have gained it, you may live anywhere. Then nothing matters."

MAHIMA : " Sir, why does a man become deluded by worldly objects ? "

MASTER : " It is because he lives in their midst without having realized God. Man never succumbs to delusion after he has realized God. The moth no longer enjoys darkness if it has once seen the light.

" To be able to realize God, one must practise absolute continence. Sages like Sukadeva are examples of an *urdhvareta*.⁷ Their chastity was absolutely unbroken. There is another class, who previously have had discharges of semen but who later on have controlled them. A man controlling the seminal fluid for twelve years develops a special power. He grows a new inner nerve called the nerve of memory. Through that nerve he remembers all, he understands all.

⁶ An eating-place where food is supplied free to monks and beggars.

⁷ A man of unbroken and complete continence.

"Loss of semen impairs the strength. But it does not injure one if one loses it in a dream. That semen one gets from food. What remains after nocturnal discharge is enough. But one must not know a woman."

"The semen that remains after nocturnal discharge is very 'refined'. The Lahas kept jars of molasses in their house. Every jar had a hole in it. After a year they found that the molasses had crystallized like sugar candy. The unnecessary watery part had leaked out through the hole."

"A sannyasi must absolutely renounce woman. You are already involved; but that doesn't matter."

"A sannyasi must not look even at the picture of a woman. But this is too difficult for an ordinary man. Sa, re, ga, ma, pa, dha, ni are the seven notes of the scale. It is not possible to keep your voice on 'ni' a long time."

"To lose semen is extremely harmful for a sannyasi. Therefore he must live so carefully that he will not have to see the form of a woman. He must keep himself away from a woman even if she is a devotee of God. It is injurious for him to look even at the picture of a woman. He will lose semen in a dream, if not in the waking state."

"A sannyasi may have control over his senses, but to set an example to mankind he should not talk with women. He must not talk to one very long, even if she is a devotee of God."

"Living as a sannyasi is like observing the ekadasi without drinking even a drop of water. There are two other ways of observing the day. You may eat fruit or take luchi and curry. With the luchi and curry you may also take slices of bread soaked in milk. (All laugh.)

(Smiling) "Absolute fasting is not possible for you."

"Once I saw Krishnakishore eating luchi and curry on an ekadasi day. I said to Hriday, 'Hridu, I want to observe Krishnakishore's ekadasi!' (All laugh.) And so I did one day. I ate my fill. The next day I had to fast." (Laughter.)

The devotees who had gone to the Panchavati to visit the hathayogi came back.

MASTER (addressing them): "Well, what do you think of him? I dare say you have measured him with your own tape."

Sri Ramakrishna saw that very few of the devotees were willing to give money to the hathayogi.

MASTER: "You don't like a sadhu if you have to give him money. Rajendra Mitra draws a salary of eight hundred rupees a month. He had been to Allahabad to see the kumbhamela. I asked him, 'Well, what kind of sadhus did you see at the fair?' Rajendra said: 'I didn't find any very great sadhu there. I noticed one, it is true. But even he accepted money.'

"I say to myself, 'If no one gives money to a sadhu, then how will he feed himself?' There is no collection plate here; therefore all come. And I say to myself: 'Alas! They love their money. Let them have it.'"

The Master rested awhile. A devotee sat on the end of the small couch and gently stroked his feet. The Master said to him softly: "That which is formless again has form. One should believe in the forms of God also. By

meditating on Kali the aspirant realizes God as Kali. Next he finds that the form merges in the Indivisible Absolute. That which is the Indivisible Sat-chidananda is verily Kali."

Sri Ramakrishna was sitting on the semicircular porch west of his room, talking with Mahima and other devotees about the hathayogi. The talk drifted to Ramprasanna, the son of Krishnakishore. The Master was fond of the young man.

MASTER : " Ramprasanna roams about aimlessly. The other day he came here and sat in the room, but he did not speak a word. He pressed his nostrils with his fingers, practising pranayama. I offered him something to eat, but he wouldn't take it. On another occasion I had asked him to sit by me. He squatted on the floor placing one leg upon the other. He was rather dis-courteous to Captain. I weep at his mother's suffering.

(To Mahima) " Ramprasanna asked me to speak to you about the hathayogi. The yogi's daily expenses are six and a half annas. But he won't tell you about it himself."

MAHIMA : " Who will listen to him even if he does ? "

Mani Sen of Panihati entered the room with several friends, one of whom was a physician. Mani asked the Master about his injured arm. The doctor did not approve of the medicine prescribed by Pratap Mazumdar. The Master said to him : " Why should you say that ? Pratap is no fool."

Suddenly Latu cried out, " Oh ! The medicine bottle has dropped and broken."

It was not yet dusk. The Master, seated on the couch, was talking to M. Mahimacharan who was on the semicircular porch engaged in a loud discussion of the scriptures with the physician friend of Mani Sen. Sri Ramakrishna heard it and with a smile said to M. : " There ! He is delivering himself. That is the characteristic of rajas. It stimulates the desire to ' lecture ' and to show off one's scholarship. But sattva makes one introspective. It makes one hide one's virtues. But I must say that Mahima is a grand person. He takes such delight in spiritual talk."

Adhar entered the room, saluted the Master, and sat by M.'s side. He had not come for the past few days.

MASTER : " Hello ! Why haven't you come all these days ? "

ADHAR : " Sir, I have been busy with so many things. I had to attend a conference of the school committee and various other meetings."

MASTER : " So you completely lost yourself in schools and meetings and forgot everything else ? "

ADHAR : " Everything else was hidden away in a corner of my mind. How is your arm ? "

MASTER : " Just look. It is not yet healed. I have been taking medicine prescribed by Pratap."

After a time the Master suddenly said to Adhar : " Look here. All these are unreal—meetings, school, office, and everything else. God alone is the Substance, and all else is illusory. One should worship God with one's whole mind."

Adhar sat without speaking a word.

MASTER : " All else is illusory. This moment the body is and the next moment it is not. One must make haste to worship God."

" But you don't have to renounce everything. Live in the world the way the tortoise does. The tortoise roams about in the water but keeps its eggs on land. Its whole mind is on the eggs."

" What a nice state of mind Captain has developed ! He looks like a rishi when he is seated to perform worship. He performs the arati with lighted camphor and recites beautiful hymns. When he rises from his seat after finishing the worship, his eyes are swollen from emotion, as if bitten by ants. Besides, he always devotes himself to the study of the sacred books, such as the *Gita* and the *Bhagavata*. Once I used one or two English words before him, and that made him angry. He said, ' English-educated people are profane.' "

After a while Adhar said humbly to the Master : " Sir, you haven't been to our place for a long time. The drawing-room smells worldly and everything else appears to be steeped in darkness."

The Master was deeply touched by these words of his devotee. He suddenly stood up and blessed M. and Adhar in an ecstatic mood, touching their heads and hearts. In a voice choked with love the Master said : " I look upon you as Narayana Himself. You are indeed my own."

Mahimacharan entered the room.

MASTER (*to Mahima*) : " What I said about aspirants practising continence is true. Without chastity one cannot assimilate these teachings.

" Once a man said to Chaitanya : ' You give the devotees so much instruction. Why don't they make much progress ? ' Chaitanya said : ' They dissipate their powers in the company of women. That is why they cannot assimilate spiritual instruction. If one keeps water in a leaky jar, the water escapes little by little through the leak.' "

Mahima and the other devotees remained silent. After a time Mahima said, " Please pray to God for us that we may acquire the necessary strength."

MASTER : " Be on your guard even now. It is difficult, no doubt, to check the torrent in the rainy season. But a great deal of water has gone out. If you build the embankment now it will stand."

* A few months after this conversation Adhar died.

XXI

A DAY AT DAKSHINESWAR

Saturday, April 5, 1884

IT WAS ABOUT EIGHT O'CLOCK in the morning when M. arrived at the temple garden and found Sri Ramakrishna seated on the small couch in his room. A few devotees were sitting on the floor. The Master was talking to them. Prankrishna Mukherji was there.

Prankrishna belonged to an aristocratic family and lived in the northern part of Calcutta. He held a high post in an English business firm. He was very much devoted to Sri Ramakrishna and, though a householder, derived great pleasure from the study of Vedanta philosophy. He was a frequent visitor at the temple garden. Once he invited the Master to his house in Calcutta and held a religious festival. Every day, early in the morning, he bathed in the holy water of the Ganges. Whenever it was convenient, he would come to Dakshineswar in a hired country boat.

That morning he had hired a boat and invited M. to accompany him to Dakshineswar. The boat had hardly left shore when the river became choppy. M. had become frightened and begged Prankrishna to put him back on land. In spite of assurances, M. had kept saying : " You must put me ashore. I shall walk to Dakshineswar." And so M. came on foot and found Sri Ramakrishna talking to Prankrishna and the others.

MASTER (*to Prankrishna*) : " But there is a greater manifestation of God in man. You may ask, ' How is it possible for God to be incarnated as a man who suffers from hunger, thirst, and the other traits of an embodied being, and perhaps also from disease and grief ? ' The reply is, ' Even Brahman weeps, entrapped in the snare of the five elements.'

' Don't you know how Rama had to weep, stricken with grief for Sita ? Further, it is said that the Lord incarnated Himself as a sow in order to kill the demon Hiranyaksha. Hiranyaksha was eventually killed, but God would not go back to His abode in heaven. He enjoyed His sow's life. He had given birth to several young ones and was rather happy with them. The gods said among themselves : ' What does this mean ? The Lord doesn't care to return to heaven ! ' They all went to Siva and laid the matter before him. Siva came down and urged the Lord to leave the sow body and return to heaven. But the sow only suckled her young ones. (*Laughter.*) Then Siva destroyed

the sow body with his trident, and the Lord came out laughing aloud and went back to His own abode."

PRANKRISHNA (*to the Master*) : "Sir, what is the Anahata sound ?"

MASTER : "It is a spontaneous sound constantly going on by itself. It is the sound of the Pranava, Om. It originates in the Supreme Brahman and is heard by yogis. People immersed in worldliness do not hear it. A yogi alone knows that this sound originates both from his navel and from the Supreme Brahman resting on the Ocean of Milk."¹

PRANKRISHNA : "Sir, what is the nature of the life after death ?"

MASTER : "Keshab Sen also asked that question. As long as a man remains ignorant, that is to say, as long as he has not realized God, so long will he be born. But after attaining Knowledge he will not have to come back to this earth or to any other plane of existence.

"The potter puts his pots in the sun to dry. Haven't you noticed that among them there are both baked and unbaked ones ? When a cow happens to walk over them, some of the pots get broken to pieces. The broken pots that are already baked, the potter throws away, since they are of no more use to him. But the soft ones, though broken, he gathers up. He makes them into a lump and out of this forms new pots. In the same way, so long as a man has not realized God, he will have to come back to the Potter's hand, that is, he will have to be born again and again.

"What is the use of sowing a boiled paddy grain ? It will never bring forth a shoot. Likewise, if a man is boiled in the fire of Knowledge, he will not be used for new creation. He is liberated.

"According to the Puranas, the bhakta and the Bhagavan are two separate entities. 'I' am one and 'You' are another. The body is a plate, as it were, containing the water of mind, intelligence, and ego. Brahman is like the sun. It is reflected in the water. Therefore the devotee sees the divine form.

"According to the Vedanta, Brahman alone is real and all else is maya, dreamlike and unsubstantial. The ego, like a stick, lies across the Ocean of Satchidananda. (*To M.*) Listen to what I am saying. When this ego is taken away, there remains only one undivided Ocean of Satchidananda. But as long as the stick of ego remains, there is an appearance of two : here is one part of the water and there another part. Attaining the Knowledge of Brahman one is established in samadhi. Then the ego is effaced.

"But Sankaracharya retained the 'ego of Knowledge'² in order to teach men. (*To Prankrishna*) But there are signs that distinguish the man of

¹ According to Hindu mythology, after the dissolution of the universe and before the next creation, the Supreme Lord rests on the Ocean of the Great Cause, also called the "Ocean of Milk".

² The ego illumined and purified by the Knowledge of God. Following the method of discrimination, the jnani, in samadhi, merges his ego in Brahman. Thereafter he may come down to the relative plane with an appearance of individuality, but even then he is always conscious of his identity with Brahman. This apparent ego is called the "ego of Knowledge". A bhakta, following the path of love, realizes his eternal relationship with God. He too keeps an appearance of individuality on the relative plane. This ego has none of the characteristics of the worldly ego and is called the "ego of Devotion". The two egos here described refer to the same state of realization.

Knowledge. Some people think they have Knowledge. What are the characteristics of Knowledge? A jnani cannot injure anybody. He becomes like a child. If a steel sword touches the philosopher's stone, it is transformed into gold. Gold can never cut. It may seem from the outside that a jnani also has anger or egotism, but in reality he has no such thing.

"From a distance a burnt string lying on the ground may look like a real one; but if you come near and blow at it, it disappears altogether. The anger and egotism of a jnani are mere appearances; they are not real."

"A child has no attachment. He makes a play house, and if anyone touches it, he will jump about and cry. The next moment he himself will break it. This moment he may be very attached to his cloth. He says: 'My daddy has given it to me. I won't part with it.' But the next moment you can cajole him away from it with a toy. He will go away with you, leaving the cloth behind."

These are the characteristics of a jnani. Perhaps he has many luxuries at home—couch, chairs, paintings, and equipage. But any day he may leave all these and go off to Benares.

"According to Vedanta the waking state, too, is unreal. Once a wood-cutter lay dreaming, when someone woke him up. Greatly annoyed, he said: 'Why have you disturbed my sleep? I was dreaming that I was a king and the father of seven children. The princes were becoming well versed in letters and military arts. I was secure on my throne and ruled over my subjects. Why have you demolished my world of joy?' 'But that was a mere dream', said the other man. 'Why should that bother you?' 'Fool!' said the wood-cutter. 'You don't understand. My becoming a king in the dream was just as real as is my being a wood-cutter. If being a wood-cutter is real, then being a king in a dream is real also!'"

Prankrishna always talked about jnana. Was this why the Master described the state of the jnani? Now he proceeded to describe the state of the vijnani.

MASTER: "Jnana is the realization of Self through the process of 'Neti, neti'; 'Not this, not this'. One goes into samadhi through this process of elimination and realizes the Atman."

"But vijnana means Knowledge with a greater fullness. Some have heard of milk, some have seen milk, and some have drunk milk. He who has merely heard of it is 'ignorant'. He who has seen it is a jnani. But he who has drunk it has vijnana, that is to say, fuller knowledge of it. After having the vision of God one talks to Him as if He were an intimate relative. That is vijnana."

"First of all you must discriminate, following the method of 'Neti, neti': 'He is not the five elements, nor the sense-organs, nor the mind, nor the intelligence, nor the ego. He is beyond all these cosmic principles.' You want to climb to the roof; then you must eliminate and leave behind all the steps, one by one. The steps are by no means the roof. But after reaching the roof you find that the steps are made of the same materials—brick, lime, and brick-dust—as the roof. It is the Supreme Brahman that has

become the universe and its living beings and the twenty-four cosmic principles. That which is Atman has become the five elements. You may ask why the earth is so hard, if it has come out of Atman? All is possible through the will of God. Don't you see that bone and flesh are made from blood and semen? How hard 'sea-foam' becomes!

"After attaining vijnana one can live in the world as well. Then one clearly realizes that God Himself has become the universe and all living beings, that He is not outside the world.

(To Prankrishna) "The fact is that one must have the 'spiritual eye'. You will develop that eye as soon as your mind becomes pure. Take for instance the Kumari Puja. I worshipped a virgin. The girl, to be sure, had all her human imperfections; still I regarded her as the Divine Mother Herself.

"On one side is the wife and on the other the son. Love is bestowed on both, but in different ways. Therefore it comes to this, that everything depends upon the mind. The pure mind acquires a new attitude. Through that mind one sees God in this world. Therefore one needs spiritual discipline.

"Yes, spiritual discipline is necessary. You should know that a man becomes easily attached to a woman. A woman naturally loves a man, and a man also naturally loves a woman. Therefore both fall speedily from their spiritual ideal. But it also must be said that there is a great advantage in leading the life of a householder. In case of urgent necessity a man may live with his wife.

(Smiling) "Well, M., why are you smiling?"

M. (to himself) : "The Master makes this much allowance for householders since they cannot renounce everything. Is complete and absolute continence impossible for a householder?"

The hathayogi who had been living in the Panchavati entered the room. He was in the habit of taking milk and opium. He did not eat rice or other food and had no money to buy the milk and opium. The Master had talked with him in the Panchavati. The hathayogi had told Rakhal to ask the Master to make some provision for him, and Sri Ramakrishna had promised to speak about it to the visitors from Calcutta.

HATHAYOGI (to the Master) : "What did you say to Rakhal about me?"

MASTER : "I said that I would ask some rich visitors to help you. But —(to Prankrishna) you, perhaps, do not like these yogis?"

Prankrishna remained silent. The hathayogi left the room and the conversation went on.

MASTER (to Prankrishna and the others) : "If a man leads a householder's life he must have unflagging devotion to truth. God can be realized through truth alone. Formerly I was very particular about telling the truth, though now my zeal has abated a little. If I said, 'I shall bathe', then I would get into the water of the Ganges, recite the mantra, and sprinkle a little water over my head. But still there would remain some doubt in me as to whether my

³ The Master perhaps referred to the cuttle-bone found on the seashore. The popular belief is that it is hardened foam.

bath was complete. Once I went to Ram's house in Calcutta. I happened to say, 'I shall not take any luchi.' When I sat down for the meal I felt hungry. But I had said I would not eat the luchi ; so I had to fill my stomach with sweets. (*All laugh.*)

"But my zeal for truthfulness has abated a little now. Once I said I would go to the pine-grove, but then I felt I had no particular urge to go. What was to be done ? I asked Ram ' about it. He said I didn't have to go. Then I reasoned to myself : ' Well, everyone is Narayana. So Ram, too, is Narayana. Why shouldn't I listen to him ? The elephant is Narayana no doubt, but the mahut is Narayana too. Since the mahut asked me not to go near the elephant, then why shouldn't I obey him ? ' Through reasoning like this my zeal for truthfulness is slightly less strong now than before.

"I find a change coming over me. Years ago Vaishnavcharan said to me, 'One attains Perfect Knowledge when one sees God in man.' Now I see that it is God alone who is moving about in various forms : as a holy man, as a cheat, as a villain. Therefore I say, ' Narayana in the guise of the sadhu, Narayana in the guise of the cheat, Narayana in the guise of the villain, Narayana in the guise of the lecher.'

"Now my problem is how I can feed all of you. I want to feed everyone. So I keep one at a time with me and feed him."

Prankrishna (*looking at M. and smiling*) : "A fine man, indeed ! (*To the Master*) He would not let us go till we put him ashore."

MASTER (*smiling*) : "Why ? What happened ?"

PRANKRISHNA : "He was in our boat. Seeing that the river was slightly rough, he insisted on being put ashore. (*To M.*) How did you come ?"

M. (*smiling*) : "On foot."

Sri Ramakrishna laughed.

PRANKRISHNA (*to the Master*) : "Sir, I am thinking now of giving up my work. One who is involved in activity cannot accomplish anything. (*Pointing to his companion*) I am training him to do my work. After I resign, he will relieve me. Work has become intolerable."

MASTER : "Yes, work is very troublesome. It is now good for you to meditate on God for a few days in solitude. No doubt you say that you would like to give up your work. Captain said the same thing. Worldly people talk that way ; but they don't succeed in carrying out their intention."

"There are many pundits who speak words of wisdom. But they merely talk ; they don't live up to them. They are like vultures, which soar very high but keep their gaze fixed on the charnel-pit. What I mean is that these pundits are attached to the world, to 'woman and gold'. If I hear that pundits are practising discrimination and dispassion, then I fear them. Otherwise I look upon them as mere goats and dogs."

Prankrishna saluted the Master and took his leave. He said to M., "Will you come with us ?"

M : "No, sir ! Catch me going with you again ! Good-bye."

Prankrishna laughed and said, "I see you won't come in the boat."

⁴ Ram Chatterji, the priest in the Radhakanta temple.

M. took a little stroll near the Panchavati and bathed in the river. Then he went to the temples of Radhakanta and Kali and prostrated himself before the images. He said to himself : " I have heard that God has no form. Then why do I bow before these images ? Is it because Sri Ramakrishna believes in gods and goddesses with form ? I don't know anything about God, nor do I understand Him. The Master believes in images ; then why shouldn't I too, who am so insignificant a creature, accept them ? "

M. looked at the image of Kali. He saw that the Divine Mother holds in Her two left hands a man's severed head and a sword. With Her two right hands She offers boons and reassurance to Her devotees. In one aspect She is terrible, and in another She is the ever affectionate Mother of Her devotees. The two ideals are harmonized in Her. She is compassionate and affectionate to Her devotees, to those who are submissive and helpless. It is also true that She is terrible, the " Consort of Death ". She alone knows why She assumes two aspects at the same time.

M. remembered this interpretation of Kali given by the Master. He said to himself, " I have heard that Keshab accepted Kali in Sri Ramakrishna's presence. Is this, as Keshab used to say, the Goddess, all Spirit and Consciousness, manifesting Herself through a clay image ? "

M. returned to the Master's room and sat on the floor. Sri Ramakrishna offered him some fruit and sweets to eat. On account of trouble in the family, M. had recently rented a house in another section of Calcutta near his school, his father and brothers continuing to live in the ancestral home. But Sri Ramakrishna wanted him to return to his own home, since a joint family affords many advantages to one leading a religious life. Once or twice the Master had spoken to M. to this effect, but unfortunately he had not yet returned to his family. Sri Ramakrishna referred to the matter again.

MASTER : " Tell me that you are going to your ancestral home. "

M : " I can never persuade myself to enter that place. "

MASTER : " Why ? Your father is making over the whole house. "

M : " I have suffered too much there. I can by no means make up my mind to go there. "

MASTER : " Whom do you fear ? "

M : " All of them. "

MASTER (*seriously*) : " Isn't that like your being afraid to get into the boat ? "

The midday worship and the offering of food in the temples were over. The bells, gongs, and cymbals of the arati were being played, and the temple garden was filled with joyful activity. Beggars, sadhus, and guests hurried to the guest-house for the noonday meal, carrying leaf or metal plates in their hands. M. also took some of the prasad from the Kali temple.

Sri Ramakrishna had been resting awhile after his meal when several devotees, including Ram and Girindra, arrived. They sat down after saluting the Master. The conversation turned to the New Dispensation Church of Keshab Chandra Sen.

RAM (*to the Master*) : " Sir, I don't think the Navavidhan has done people any good. If Keshab Babu himself was a genuine man, why are his

disciples left in such a plight? I don't think there is anything at all in the New Dispensation. It is like rattling some potsherds in a room and then locking it up. People may take it to be the jingling of coins, but inside there is nothing but potsherds. Outsiders don't know what is inside."

MASTER : "There must be some substance in it. Otherwise, why should so many people respect Keshab? Why isn't Shivanath honoured as much as Keshab? Such a thing cannot happen without the will of God."

"But a man cannot act as an acharya without renouncing the world. People won't respect him. They will say : 'Oh, he is a worldly man. He secretly enjoys "woman and gold" himself but tells us that God alone is real and the world unsubstantial, like a dream.' Unless a man renounces everything his teachings cannot be accepted by all. Some worldly people may follow him. Keshab led the life of a householder; hence his mind was directed to the world also. He had to safeguard his family interests. That is why he left his affairs in such good order though he delivered so many religious lectures. What an aristocratic man he married his daughter to! Inside Keshab's inner apartments I saw many big bedsteads. All these things gradually come to one who leads a householder's life. The world is indeed a place for enjoyment."

RAM : "Keshab Sen inherited those bedsteads when his ancestral property was divided. And for Keshab to take part in the division of property! Whatever you may say, sir, Vijay Babu told me that Keshab had said to him, 'I am a partial manifestation of Christ and Gauranga. I suggest that you declare yourself as Advaita.' Do you know what else he said? He said that you too were a follower of the New Dispensation." (*All laugh.*)

MASTER (*laughing*) : "Who knows? But as for myself, I don't even know what the term 'New Dispensation' means." (*Laughter.*)

RAM : "Keshab's disciples say that he was the first to harmonize jnana and bhakti."

MASTER (*in surprise*) : "How is that? What then of the *Adhyatma Ramayana*? It is written there that, while praying to Rama, Narada said : 'O Rama. Thou art the Supreme Brahman described in the Vedas. Thou dwellest with us as a man; Thou appearest as a man. In reality Thou art not a man; Thou art that Supreme Brahman.' Rama said : 'Narada, I am very much pleased with you. Accept a boon from Me.' Narada replied : 'What boon shall I ask of Thee? Grant me pure love for Thy Lotus Feet, and may I never be deluded by Thy world-bewitching maya!' The *Adhyatma Ramayana* is full of such statements regarding jnana and bhakti."

The conversation turned to Amrita, a disciple of Keshab.

RAM : "Amrita Babu seems to be in very bad shape."

MASTER : "Yes, he looked very ill when I saw him the other day."

RAM : "Sir, let me tell you about the lectures of the New Dispensation. While the drum is being played, the members cry out, 'Victory unto Keshab!' You say that 'dal'^a grows only in a stagnant pool. So Amrita said

^a An intimate companion of Gauranga.

^b The word has the double meaning of "sedge" and "sect".

one day in the course of his sermon : ' The holy man ' has no doubt said that ' dal ' grows in a stagnant pool. But, brothers, we want ' dal ' ; we want a sect. Really and truly, I tell you that we want a sect.'"

MASTER : " What nonsense ! Shame on him ! What kind of sermon is that ? "

The conversation drifted to the desire of some people for praise.

MASTER : " They took me to Keshab's house to see a performance of the *Nimai-sannyas*. I heard that day someone speaking of Keshab and Pratap as Chaitanya and Nityananda. Prasanna asked me, ' Who are you then ? ' Keshab looked at me to see what I would say. I said to him, ' I am the servant of your servant, the dust of the dust of your feet.' Keshab said with a smile, ' You can't catch him ! ' "

RAM : " Sometimes Keshab used to say you were John the Baptist."

A DEVOTEE : " But Keshab also said you were the Chaitanya of the nineteenth century [said in English]."

MASTER : " What does that mean ? "

DEVOTEE : " That Chaitanya has been incarnated again in the present century of the Christian era, and that you are he."

MASTER (*absent-mindedly*) : " What of it ? Can you tell me now how my arm can be cured ? This arm is worrying me so much."

They talked about Trailokya's music. Trailokya sang devotional songs in Keshab's Brahmo Samaj.

MASTER : " Ah ! How nice his songs are ! "

RAM : " Do you think they are genuine ? "

MASTER : " Yes, they are. Otherwise, why should I be so drawn to them ? "

RAM : " He has composed his songs by borrowing your ideas. While conducting the worship Keshab Sen described your feelings and realizations, and Trailokya Babu composed songs accordingly. Take this song, for instance :

There is an overflow of Joy in the market-place of Love ;
See how the Lord sports with His own in the ecstasy of Bliss !

He saw you enjoying divine bliss in the company of devotees and wrote songs like this."

MASTER (*with a smile*) : " Stop ! Don't torment me any more. Why should I be involved in all this ? " (*All laugh.*)

GIRINDRA : " The Brahmos say that the Paramahamsadeva has no faculty for organization [said in English]."

MASTER : " What does that mean ? "

M : " That you don't know how to lead a sect ; that your intellect is rather dull. They say things like that." (*All laugh.*)

MASTER (*to Ram*) : " Now tell me why my arm was hurt. Stand up and deliver a lecture on that. (*Laughter.*)

" The Brahmos insist that God is formless. Suppose they do. It is enough to call on Him with sincerity of heart. If the devotee is sincere, then

¹ Referring to Sri Ramakrishna.

God, who is the inner Guide of all, will certainly reveal to the devotee His true nature.

"But it is not good to say that what we ourselves think of God is the only truth and what others think is false ; that because we think of God as formless, therefore He is formless and cannot have any form ; that because we think of God as having form, therefore He has form and cannot be formless. Can a man really fathom God's nature ?

"This kind of friction exists between the Vaishnavas and the Saktas. The Vaishnava says, 'My Kesava is the only Saviour', whereas the Sakta insists, 'My Bhagavati is the only Saviour.'

"Once I took Vaishnavcharan to Mathur Babu. Now, Vaishnavcharan was a very learned Vaishnava and an orthodox devotee of his sect. Mathur, on the other hand, was a devotee of the Divine Mother. They were engaged in a friendly discussion when suddenly Vaishnavcharan said, 'Kesava is the only Saviour.' No sooner did Mathur hear this than his face became red with anger and he blurted out, 'You rascal !' (*All laugh.*) He was a Sakta. Wasn't it natural for him to say that ? I gave Vaishnavcharan a nudge.

"I see people who talk about religion constantly quarrelling with one another. Hindus, Mussalmans, Brahmos, Saktas, Vaishnavas, Saivas, all quarrel with one another. They haven't the intelligence to understand that He who is called Krishna is also Siva and the Primal Sakti, and that it is He, again, who is called Jesus and Allah. 'There is only one Rama and He has a thousand names.'

"Truth is one ; only It is called by different names. All people are seeking the same Truth ; the variance is due to climate, temperament, and name. A lake has many ghats. From one ghat the Hindus take water in jars and call it 'jal'. From another ghat the Mussalmans take water in leather bags and call it 'pani'. From a third the Christians take the same thing and call it 'water'. (*All laugh.*) Suppose someone says that the thing is not 'jal' but 'pani', or that it is not 'pani' but 'water', or that it is not 'water' but 'jal'. It would indeed be ridiculous. But this very thing is at the root of the friction among sects, their misunderstandings and quarrels. This is why people injure and kill one another, and shed blood, in the name of religion. But this is not good. Everyone is going toward God. They will all realize Him if they have sincerity and longing of heart.

(To M.) "This is for you. All scriptures—the Vedas, the Puranas, the Tantras—seek Him alone and no one else, only that one Satchidananda. That which is called Satchidananda Brahman in the Vedas is called Satchidananda Siva in the Tantra. Again it is He alone who is called Satchidananda Krishna in the Puranas."

The Master was told that now and then Ram cooked his own food at home.

MASTER (to M.) : "Do you too cook your own meals ?"

M : "No, sir."

MASTER : "You may try it. With your meals take a little clarified butter made from cow's milk. That will purify your body and mind."

A long conversation ensued about Ram's household affairs. Ram's father was a devout Vaishnava and worshipped Krishna daily at home. He had married a second time when Ram was quite young. Both the father and the stepmother lived with Ram at Ram's house. But Ram was never happy with his stepmother, and this sometimes created a misunderstanding between himself and his father.

"They were talking about this when Ram said, "My father has gone to the dogs!"

MASTER (*to the devotees*) : "Did you hear that? The father has gone to the dogs and the son is all right!"

RAM : "There is no peace when my stepmother comes home. There is always some trouble or other. Our family is about to break up. So I say, let her live with her father."

GIRINDRA (*to Ram*) : "Why don't you too keep your wife at her father's home?" (*Laughter*.)

MASTER (*smiling*) : "Are husband and wife like earthen pots or jars, that you may keep the pot in one place and the lid in another? Siva in one place and Sakti in another?"

RAM : "Sir, we are quite happy. But when she comes the family is broken up. If such is the case—"

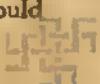
MASTER : "Then build them a separate home. That will be a different thing. You will defray their monthly expenses. How worthy of worship one's parents are! Rakhal asked me if he could take the food left on his father's plate. 'What do you mean?' I said. 'What have you become that you cannot? But it is also true that good people won't give anyone, even a dog, the food from their plates."

GIRINDRA : "Sir, suppose one's parents are guilty of a terrible crime, a heinous sin?"

MASTER : "What if they are? You must not renounce your mother even if she commits adultery. The woman guru of a certain family became corrupt. The members of the family said that they would like to make the son of the guru their spiritual guide. But I said: 'How is that? Will you accept the shoot and give up the yam? Suppose she is corrupt; still you must regard her as your Ishta. "Though my guru visits the tavern, still to me he is the holy Nityananda."

"Are father and mother mere trifles? No spiritual practice will bear fruit unless they are pleased. Chaitanya was intoxicated with the love of God. Still, before taking to the monastic life, for how many days did he try to persuade his mother to give him her permission to become a monk! He said to her: 'Mother, don't worry. I shall visit you every now and then.'

(*To M., reproachfully*) "And let me say this to you. Your father and mother brought you up. You yourself are the father of several children. Yet you have left home with your wife. You have cheated your parents. You have come away with your wife and children, and you feel you have become a holy man. Your father doesn't need any money from you; otherwise I should have cried, 'Shame on you!'"



Everybody in the room became grave and remained silent.

MASTER : "A man has certain debts to pay : his debts to the gods and rishis, and his debts to mother, father, and wife. He cannot achieve anything without paying the debt he owes to his parents. A man is indebted to his wife as well. Harish has renounced his wife and is living here. If he had left her unprovided for, then I should have called him an abominable wretch."

"After attaining Knowledge you will regard that very wife as the manifestation of the Divine Mother Herself. It is written in the *Chandi*, 'The Goddess dwells in all beings as the Mother.' It is She who has become your mother."

"All the women you see are only She, the Divine Mother. That is why I cannot rebuke even Brinde, the maidservant. There are people who spout verses from the scriptures and talk big, but in their conduct they are quite different. Ramprasanna is constantly busy procuring opium and milk for the hathayogi. He says that Manu enjoins it upon man to serve the sadhu. But his old mother hasn't enough to eat. She walks to the market to buy her own groceries. It makes me very angry."

"But here you have to consider another thing. When a man is intoxicated with ecstatic love of God, then who is his father or mother or wife ? His love of God is so intense that he becomes mad with it. Then he has no duty to perform. He is free from all debts. What is this divine intoxication ? In this state a man forgets the world. He also forgets his own body, which is so dear to all. Chaitanya had this intoxication. He plunged into the ocean not knowing that it was the ocean. He dashed himself again and again on the ground. He was not aware of hunger, of thirst, or of sleep. He was not at all conscious of any such thing as his body."

All at once Sri Ramakrishna exclaimed, "Ah, Chaitanya !" and stood up.

MASTER (*to the devotees*) : "Chaitanya means 'Undivided Consciousness'. Vaishnavcharan used to say that Gauranga was like a bubble in the Ocean of Undivided Consciousness."

(*To the elder Gopal*) "Do you intend to go on a pilgrimage now ?"

GOPAL : "Yes, sir. I should like to wander about a little."

RAM (*to Gopal*) : "He [meaning the Master] says that one becomes a kutichaka after being a bahudaka. The sadhu that visits many holy places is called a bahudaka. He whose craving for travel has been satiated and who sits down in one place is called a kutichaka."

"He also tells us a parable. Once a bird sat on the mast of a ship. When the ship sailed through the mouth of the Ganges into the 'black waters' of the ocean, the bird failed to notice the fact. When it finally became aware of the ocean, it left the mast and flew north in search of land. But it found no limit to the water and so returned. After resting awhile it flew south. There too it found no limit to the water. Panting for breath the bird returned to the mast. Again, after resting awhile, it flew east and then west. Finding no limit to the water in any direction, at last it settled down on the mast of the ship."

³ A monastic disciple of the Master, known later as Swami Advaitananda.

MASTER (*to the elder Gopal and the other devotees*) : "As long as a man feels that God is 'there', he is ignorant. But he attains Knowledge when he feels that God is 'here'."

"A man wanted a smoke. He went to a neighbour's house to light his charcoal. It was the dead of night and the household was asleep. After he had knocked a great deal, someone came down to open the door. At sight of the man he asked, 'Hello ! What's the matter ?' The man replied : 'Can't you guess ? You know how fond I am of smoking. I have come here to light my charcoal.' The neighbour said : 'Ha ! Ha ! You are a fine man indeed ! You took the trouble to come and do all this knocking at the door ! Why, you have a lighted lantern in your hand !' (*All laugh.*)

"What a man seeks is very near him. Still he wanders about from place to place."

RAM : "Sir, I now realize why a guru asks some of his disciples to visit the four principal holy places of the country. Once having wandered about, the disciple discovers that it is the same here as there. Then he returns to the guru. All this wandering is only to create faith in the guru's words."

After this conversation had come to an end, Sri Ramakrishna extolled Ram's virtues.

MASTER (*to the devotees*) : "How many fine qualities Ram possesses ! How many devotees he serves and looks after ! (*To Ram*) Adhar told me that you showed him great kindness."

Adhar, a beloved householder devotee of the Master, had recently arranged some religious music at his house. The Master and many devotees had been present. But Adhar had forgotten to invite Ram, who was a very proud man and had complained about it to his friends. So Adhar had gone to Ram's house to express his regret for the mistake.

RAM : "It wasn't really Adhar's mistake. I have come to know that Rakhal is to blame. Rakhal was given charge—"

MASTER : "You mustn't find fault with Rakhal. He's a mere child. Even now you can bring out his mother's milk by squeezing his throat."

RAM : "Sir, why should you speak that way ? It was such an occasion !"

MASTER (*interrupting*) : "Adhar simply didn't remember to invite you. He is absent-minded. The other day he went with me to Jadu Mallick's house. As we took our leave, I said to him, 'You haven't offered anything to the Goddess in the chapel.' 'Sir,' he said, 'I didn't know one should.'

(*To Ram*) "Suppose he didn't invite you to his house. Why such a fuss about going to a place where the name of the Lord was sung ? One may go unasked to participate in religious music. One doesn't have to be invited."

XXII

ADVICE TO AN ACTOR

Saturday, May 24, 1884

SRI RAMAKRISHNA was sitting on the small couch in his room. Rakhal, M., and several other devotees were present. A special worship of Kali had been performed in the temple the previous night. In connexion with the worship a theatrical performance of the *Vidyasundar* had been staged in the natmandir. The Master had watched a part of it that morning. The actors came to his room to pay him their respects. The Master, in a happy mood, became engaged in conversation with a fair-complexioned young man who had taken the part of Vidya and played his part very well.

MASTER (*to the actor*) : "Your acting was very good. If a person excels in singing, music, dancing, or any other art, he can also quickly realize God provided he strives sincerely."

"Just as you practise much in order to sing, dance, and play on instruments, so one should practise the art of fixing the mind on God. One should practise regularly such disciplines as worship, japa, and meditation."

"Are you married? Any children?"

ACTOR : "Yes, sir. I had a girl who died. Another child has been born."

MASTER : "Ah! A death and a birth, and all so quickly! You are so young! There is a saying : 'My husband died just after our marriage. There are so many nights for me to weep!' You are no doubt realizing the nature of worldly happiness. The world is like a hog plum. The hog plum has only pit and skin, and after eating it you suffer from colic."

"You are an actor in the theatre. That's fine. But it is a very painful profession. You are young now; so you have a full, round face. Afterwards there will be hollows in your cheeks. Almost all actors become like that; they get hollow cheeks and big bellies. (*Laughter.*)

"Why did I stay to watch your performance? I found the rhythm, the music, and the melody all correct. Then the Divine Mother showed me that it was God alone who acted in the performance in the roles of the players."

ACTOR : "Sir, what is the difference between lust and desire?"

MASTER : "Lust is like the root of the tree, and desires are branches and twigs."

"One cannot completely get rid of the six passions : lust, anger, greed, and the like. Therefore one should direct them to God. If you must have desire and greed, then you should desire love of God and be greedy to attain Him. If you must be conceited and egotistic, then feel conceited and egotistic thinking that you are the servant of God, the child of God.

"A man cannot see God unless he gives his whole mind to Him. The mind is wasted on 'woman and gold'. Take your own case. You have children and are occupied with the theatre. The mind cannot be united with God on account of these different activities.

"As long as there is bhoga, there will be less of yoga. Furthermore, bhoga begets suffering. It is said in the *Bhagavata* that the Avadhuta chose a kite as one of his twenty-four gurus. The kite had a fish in its beak ; so it was surrounded by a thousand crows. Whichever way it flew with the fish, the crows pursued it crying, 'Caw ! Caw !' When all of a sudden the fish dropped from its beak, the crows flew after the fish, leaving the kite alone.

"The 'fish' is the object of enjoyment. The 'crows' are worries and anxiety. Worries and anxiety are inevitable with enjoyment. No sooner does one give up enjoyment than one finds peace.

"What is more, money itself becomes a source of trouble. Brothers may live happily, but they get into trouble when the property is divided. Dogs lick one another's bodies ; they are perfectly friendly. But when the householder throws them a little food, they get into a scrap.

"Come here now and then. (*Pointing to M. and the others*) They come here on Sundays and other holidays."

ACTOR : "We have holidays for three months, during the rainy and harvest seasons. It is our good fortune to be able to visit you. On our way to Dakshineswar we heard of two persons—yourself and Jnanarnava."

MASTER : "Be on friendly terms with your brothers. It looks well. You must have noticed in your theatrical performance that if your singers sing each in a different way, the play is spoiled."

ACTOR : "Yes, sir. Many birds are trapped in a net ; if they all fly together and drag the net in one direction, then many of them may be saved. But that doesn't happen if they try to fly in different directions."

"One also sees in a theatrical performance a person keeping a pitcher of water on his head and at the same time dancing about."

MASTER : "Live in the world but keep the pitcher steady on your head ; that is to say, keep the mind firmly on God."

"I once said to the sepoys from the barracks : 'Do your duty in the world but remember that the "pestle of death" will some time smash your hand. Be alert about it.'

"In Kamarupur I have seen the women of carpenter families making flattened rice with a husking-machine. One woman kicks the end of the wooden beam, and another woman, while nursing her baby, turns the paddy in the mortar dug in the earth. The second woman is always alert lest the pestle of the machine should fall on her hand. With the other hand she fries the soaked paddy in a pan. Besides, she is talking with customers ;

she says : ' You owe us so much money. Please pay it before you go.' Likewise, do your different duties in the world, fixing your mind on God. But practice is necessary, and one should also be alert. Only in this way can one safeguard both—God and the world."

ACTOR : " Sir, what is the proof that the soul is separate from the body ? "

MASTER : " Proof ? God can be seen. By practising spiritual discipline one sees God, through His grace. The rishis directly realized the Self. One cannot know the truth about God through science. Science gives us information only about things perceived by the senses, as for instance : this material mixed with that material gives such and such a result, and that material mixed with this material gives such and such a result.

" For this reason a man cannot comprehend spiritual things with his ordinary intelligence. To understand them he must live in the company of holy persons. You learn to feel the pulse by living with a physician."

ACTOR : " Yes, sir. Now I understand."

MASTER : " You must practise tapasya. Only then can you attain the goal. It will avail you nothing even if you learn the texts of the scriptures by heart. You cannot become intoxicated by merely saying ' siddhi ' over and over. You must swallow some."

" One cannot explain the vision of God to others. One cannot explain conjugal happiness to a child five years old."

ACTOR : " How does one realize the Atman ? "

Just then Rakhal was about to take his meal in the Master's room. He hesitated at the sight of so many people. During those days the Master looked on Rakhal as Gopala, and on himself as Mother Yasoda.

MASTER (*to Rakhal*) : " Why don't you eat ? Let the people stand aside if you wish it. (*To a devotee*) Keep some ice for Rakhal. (*To Rakhal*) Do you intend to go to Vanhooghly ? Don't go in this sun."

Rakhal sat down to his meal. Sri Ramakrishna again spoke to the actor.

MASTER : " Why didn't all of you take your meal from the kitchen of the Kali temple ? That would have been nice."

ACTOR : " All of us don't have the same opinion about food ; so our food is cooked separately. All don't like to eat in the guest-house."

While Rakhal was taking his meal, the Master and the devotees sat on the porch and continued their conversation.

MASTER (*to the actor*) : " You asked me about Self-realization. Longing is the means of realizing Atman. A man must strive to attain God with all his body, with all his mind, and with all his speech. Because of an excess of bile one gets jaundice. Then one sees everything as yellow ; one perceives no colour but ' yellow. Among you actors, those who take only the roles of women acquire the nature of a woman ; by thinking of woman your ways and thoughts become womanly. Just so, by thinking day and night of God one acquires the nature of God.

" The mind is like white linen just returned from the laundry. It takes on the colour you dip it in."

ACTOR : "But it must first be sent to the laundry."

MASTER : "Yes. First is the purification of the mind. Afterwards, if you direct the mind to the contemplation of God, it will be coloured by God-Consciousness. Again, if you direct the mind to worldly duties, such as the acting of a play, it will be coloured by worldliness."

Sri Ramakrishna had rested on his bed only a few minutes when Hari,¹ Narayan, Narendra Bannerji, and other devotees arrived from Calcutta and saluted him. Narendra Bannerji was the son of the professor of Sanskrit at the Presidency College of Calcutta. Because of friction with other members of the family, he had rented a separate house where he lived with his wife and children. Narendra was a very simple and guileless man. He practised spiritual discipline and, at the time of meditation, heard various sounds—the sound of a gong, and so on. He had travelled in different parts of India and he visited the Master now and then.

Narayan was a schoolboy sixteen or seventeen years old. He often visited the Master, who was very fond of him.

Hari lived with his brothers at their Baghbazar house. He had studied up to the matriculation class in the General Assembly Institution. Then he had given up his studies and devoted his time at home to the contemplation of God, the reading of the scriptures, and the practice of yoga. He also visited the Master now and then. Sri Ramakrishna often sent for Hari when he went to Balaram's house in Baghbazar.

MASTER (*to the devotees*) "I have heard a great deal about Buddha. He is one of the ten Incarnations of God." Brahman is immovable, immutable, inactive, and of the nature of Consciousness. When a man merges his *buddhi*, his intelligence, in *Bodha*, Consciousness, then he attains the Knowledge of Brahman ; he becomes *buddha*, enlightened.

"Nangta used to say that the mind merges in the *buddhi*, and the *buddhi* in *Bodha*, Consciousness.

"The aspirant does not attain the Knowledge of Brahman as long as he is conscious of his ego. The ego comes under one's control after one has obtained the Knowledge of Brahman and seen God. Otherwise the ego cannot be controlled. It is difficult to catch one's own shadow. But when the sun is overhead, the shadow is within a few inches of the body."

A DEVOTEE : "What is the vision of God like ?"

MASTER : "Haven't you seen a theatrical performance ? The people are engaged in conversation, when suddenly the curtain goes up. Then the entire mind of the audience is directed to the play. The people don't look at other things any longer. Samadhi is to go within oneself like that. When the curtain is rung down, people look around again. Just so, when the curtain of maya falls, the mind becomes externalized.

(*To Narendra Bannerji*) "You have travelled a great deal. Tell us something about the sadhus."

¹ A monastic disciple of the Master, later known as Swami Turiyananda.

² Hindu mythology speaks of ten Incarnations of God.

Narendra told the story of two yogis in Bhutan who used to drink daily a pound of the bitter juice of neem-leaves. He had also visited the hermitage of a holy man on the bank of the Narmada. At the sight of the Bengali Babu dressed in European clothes, the sadhu had remarked, "He has a knife hidden under his clothes, next to his belly."

MASTER : "One should keep pictures of holy men in one's room. That constantly quickens divine ideas."

BANNERJI : "I have your picture in my room ; also the picture of a sadhu living in the mountains, blowing on a piece of lighted charcoal in a bowl of hemp."³

MASTER : "It is true that one's spiritual feelings are awakened by looking at the picture of a sadhu. It is like being reminded of the custard-apple by looking at an imitation one, or like stimulating the desire for enjoyment by looking at a young woman. Therefore I tell you that you should constantly live in the company of holy men.

(To Bannerji) "You know very well the suffering of the world. You suffer whenever you accept enjoyment. As long as the kite kept the fish in its beak, it was tormented by the flock of crows.

"One finds peace of mind in the company of holy men. The alligator remains under water a long time. But every now and then it rises to the surface and breathes with a deep wheezing noise. Then it gives a sigh of relief."

ACTOR : "Revered sir, what you have just said about enjoyment is very true. One ultimately courts disaster if one prays to God for enjoyment. Various desires come to the mind and by no means all of them are good. God is the Kalpataru, the Wish-fulfilling Tree. A man gets whatever he asks of God. Suppose it comes to his mind : 'God is the Kalpataru. Well, let me see if a tiger will appear before me.' Because he thinks of the tiger, it really appears and devours him."

MASTER : "Yes, you must remember that the tiger comes. What more shall I tell you ? Keep your mind on God. Don't forget Him. God will certainly reveal Himself to you if you pray to Him with sincerity. Another thing. Sing the name of God at the end of each performance. Then the actors, the singers, and the audience will go home with the thought of God in their minds."

The actors saluted the Master and took their leave.

Two ladies, devotees of Sri Ramakrishna, entered the room and saluted the Master. They had been fasting in preparation for this visit. They were sisters-in-law, the wives of two brothers, and were twenty-two or twenty-three years old. They were mothers of children. Both of them had their faces covered with veils.

MASTER (to the ladies) : "Worship Siva. This worship is described in a book called the *Nityakarma*. Learn the rituals from it. In order to perform the worship of God you will be preoccupied for a long time with such religious duties as plucking flowers, making sandal-paste, polishing the utensils of worship, and arranging offerings. As you perform these duties your mind will naturally be directed to God. You will get rid of meanness, anger, jealousy,

³ Many wandering monks smoke Indian hemp.

and so forth. When you two sisters talk to each other, always talk about spiritual matters.

"The thing is somehow to unite the mind with God. You must not forget Him, not even once. Your thought of Him should be like the flow of oil, without any interruption. If you worship with love even a brick or stone as God, then through His grace you can see Him."

"Remember what I have just said to you. One should perform such worship as the Siva Puja. Once the mind has become mature, one doesn't have to continue formal worship for long. The mind then always remains united with God; meditation and contemplation become a constant habit of mind."

ELDER SISTER-IN-LAW : "Will you please give us some instruction?"

MASTER (*affectionately*) : "I don't give initiation. If a guru gives initiation he must assume responsibility for the disciple's sin and suffering. The Divine Mother has placed me in the state of a child. Perform the Siva Puja as I told you. Come here now and then. We shall see what happens later on through the will of God. I asked you to chant the name of Hari at home. Are you doing that?"

ELDER SISTER-IN-LAW : "Yes."

MASTER : "Why have you fasted? You should take your meal before you come here. Women are but so many forms of my Divine Mother. I cannot bear to see them suffer. You are all images of the Mother of the Universe. Come here after you have eaten, and you will feel happy."

Saying this, Sri Ramakrishna asked Ramlal to give the ladies some food. They were given fruit, sweets, drinks, and other offerings from the temple.

The Master said : "You have eaten something. Now my mind is at peace. I cannot bear to see women fast."

It was about five o'clock in the afternoon. Sri Ramakrishna was sitting on the steps of the Siva temples. Adhar, Dr. Nitai, M., and several other devotees were with him.

MASTER (*to the devotees*) : "I want to tell you something. A change has been coming over my nature."

The Master came down a step and sat near the devotees. It seemed that he intended to communicate some of his deeper experiences to them.

MASTER : "You are devotees. I have no hesitation in telling you this. Nowadays I don't see the Spirit-form of God. He is revealed to me in human form. It is my nature to see the form of God, to touch and embrace Him. God is saying to me, 'You have assumed a body; therefore enjoy God through His human forms.'

"God no doubt dwells in all, but He manifests Himself more through man than through other beings. Is man an insignificant thing? He can think of God, he can think of the Infinite, while other living beings cannot. God exists in other living beings—animals, plants, nay, in all beings—but He manifests Himself more through man than through these others. Fire exists in all beings, in all things; but its presence is felt more in wood. Rama said to

Lakshmana : 'Look at the elephant, brother. He is such a big animal, but he cannot think of God.'

"But in the Incarnation there is a greater manifestation of God than in other men. Rama said to Lakshmana, 'Brother, if you see in a man ecstatic love of God, if he laughs, weeps, and dances in divine ecstasy, then know for certain that I dwell in him.'

The Master remained silent. After a few minutes he resumed the conversation.

MASTER : "Keshab Sen used to come here frequently. As a result he changed a great deal. Of late he became quite a remarkable man. Many a time he came here with his party; but he also wanted to come alone. In the earlier years of his life Keshab didn't have much opportunity to live in the company of holy men.

"I visited him at his house in Colootola Street. Hriday was with me. We were shown into the room where Keshab was working. He was writing something. After a long while he put aside his pen, got off his chair, and sat on the floor with us. But he didn't salute us or show us respect in any other way.

"He used to come here now and then. One day in a spiritual mood I said to him : 'One should not sit before a sadhu with one leg over the other. That increases one's rajas.' As soon as he and his friends would arrive, I would salute them before they bowed to me. Thus they gradually learnt to salute a holy man, touching the ground with their foreheads.

"I said to Keshab : 'Chant the name of Hari. In the Kaliyuga one should sing the name and glories of God.' After that they began to sing the name of God with drums and cymbals.¹

"Do you know how my faith in the name of Hari was all the more strengthened? Holy men, as you know, frequently visit the temple garden. Once a sadhu from Multan arrived. He was waiting for a party going to Gangasagar. (*Pointing to M.*) The sadhu was of his age. It was he who said to me, 'The way to realize God in the Kaliyuga is the path of bhakti as prescribed by Narada.'

"One day Keshab came here with his followers. They stayed till ten at night. We were well seated in the Panchavati. Pratap and several others said they would like to spend the night here. Keshab said : 'No, I must go. I have some work to do.' I laughed and said : 'Can't you sleep without the smell of your fish-basket?' Once a fishwife was a guest in the house of a gardener who raised flowers. She came there with her empty basket, after selling fish in the market, and was asked to sleep in a room where flowers were kept. But, because of the fragrance of the flowers, she couldn't get to sleep for a long time. Her hostess saw her condition and said, "Hello! Why are you tossing from side to side so restlessly?" The fishwife said : "I don't know, friend.

¹ For some years before meeting the Master, Keshab and his followers had been singing the name of "Brahma" to the accompaniment of drums and cymbals. After meeting Sri Ramakrishna in 1875, Keshab showed particular devotion to the singing of the names of Hari and the Divine Mother. [Foot-note by M. in the Bengali Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna, Vol. v, p. 113.]

Perhaps the smell of the flowers has been disturbing my sleep. Can you give me my fish-basket? Perhaps that will put me to sleep." The basket was brought to her. She sprinkled water on it and set it near her nose. Then she fell sound asleep and snored all night.'

"At this story the followers of Keshab burst into loud laughter.

"Keshab conducted the prayer that evening at the bathing-ghat on the river. After the worship I said to him : 'It is God who manifests Himself, in one aspect, as the scriptures ; therefore one should worship the sacred books, such as the Vedas, the Puranas, and the Tantras. In another aspect He has become the devotee. The heart of the devotee is God's drawing-room. One can easily find one's master in the drawing-room. Therefore, by worshipping His devotee, one worships God Himself.'

"Keshab and his followers listened to my words with great attention. It was a full-moon night. The sky was flooded with light. We were seated in the open court at the top of the stairs leading to the river. I said, 'Now let us all chant, "Bhagavata—Bhakta—Bhagavan."' All chanted in unison, 'Bhagavata—Bhakta—Bhagavan.' Next I said to them, 'Say, "Brahman is verily Sakti ; Sakti is verily Brahman."' Again they chanted in unison, 'Brahman is verily Sakti ; Sakti is verily Brahman.' I said to them : 'He whom you address as Brahma is none other than She whom I call Mother. Mother is a very sweet name.'

"Then I said to them, 'Say, "Guru—Krishna—Vaishnava."'⁴ At this Keshab said : 'We must not go so far, sir. If we do that, then all will take us for orthodox Vaishnavas.'

"I used to tell Keshab now and then : 'He whom you address as Brahma is none other than She whom I call Sakti, the Primal Energy. It is called Brahman in the Vedas when It transcends speech and thought and is without attributes and action. I call It Sakti, Adyasakti, and so forth, when I find It creating, preserving, and destroying the universe.'

"I said to Keshab : 'It is extremely difficult to realize God while leading a worldly life. How can a typhoid patient be cured if he is kept in a room where tamarind, pickle, and jars of water are kept? Therefore one should go into solitude now and then to practise spiritual discipline. When the trunk of a tree becomes thick and strong, an elephant can be tied to it ; but a young sapling is eaten by cattle.' That is why Keshab would say in his lectures, 'Live in the world after being strengthened in spiritual life.'

(To the devotees) "You see, Keshab was a great scholar. He lectured in English. Many people honoured him. Queen Victoria herself talked to him. But when Keshab came here he would be bare-bodied and bring some fruit, as one should when visiting a holy man. He was totally free from egotism.

(To Adhar) "You are a scholar and a deputy magistrate, but with all that you are hen-pecked. Go forward. Beyond the forest of sandal-wood there are many more valuable things : silver-mines, gold-mines, diamonds, and other

⁴ The Master meant that the guru, Krishna, and the Vaishnava were to be equally revered. One should honour the Vaishnava because God dwells in his heart.

gems. The wood-cutter was chopping wood in the forest ; the brahmachari said to him, ' Go forward.'

Sri Ramakrishna came down from the steps of the Siva temples and went to his own room through the courtyard. The devotees were with him. Just then Ram Chatterji came and said that the Holy Mother's attendant had had an attack of cholera.

RAM (to the Master) : " I told you about it at ten o'clock this morning, but you didn't pay any attention to me."

MASTER : " What could I do ? "

RAM : " Yes, what could you do ! But there were Rakhal, Ramlal, and others. Even they didn't pay any attention."

M : " Kishori has gone to Alambazar to get medicine."

MASTER : " Alone ? Where will he get medicine ? "

M : " Yes, alone. He will get it at Alambazar."

MASTER (to M.) : " Tell the nurse what to do if the illness takes a turn for the worse or if the patient feels better."

M : " Yes, sir."

The ladies mentioned before saluted the Master and were about to take their leave. Sri Ramakrishna again said to them : " Perform the Siva Puja according to my instruction. And have something to eat before you come here. Otherwise I shall feel unhappy. Come another day."

Sri Ramakrishna sat down on the porch west of his room. Narendra Bannerji, Hari, M., and others sat by his side. The Master knew about Narendra's family difficulties.

MASTER : " You see, all these sufferings are ' because of a piece of loin-cloth ' . A man takes a wife and begets children ; therefore he must secure a job. The sadhu is worried about his loin-cloth, and the householder about his wife. Further, the householder may not live on good terms with his relatives ; so he must live separately with his wife. (With a laugh) Chaitanya once said to Nityananda : ' Listen to me, brother. A man entangled in worldliness can never be free.' "

M. (to himself) : " Perhaps the Master is referring to the world of avidya. It is the world of avidya that entangles a householder."

M. was still living in a separate house with his wife, on account of a misunderstanding with the other members of his family.

MASTER (to Bannerji, pointing to M.) : " He also lives in a separate house. You two will get along very well. Once two men happened to meet. One said to the other, ' Who are you ? ' ' Oh, I am away from my country ', was the other's reply. The second man then asked the first, ' And who are you,

¹ A reference to the following story, which Sri Ramakrishna often told his devotees : There was a sannyasi whose only possession was two pairs of loin-cloths. One day a mouse nibbled at one piece. So the holy man kept a cat to protect his loin-cloths from the mouse. Then he had to keep a cow to supply milk for the cat. Later he had to engage a servant to look after the cow. Gradually the number of his cows multiplied. He acquired pastures and farm land. He had to engage a number of servants. Thus he became, in course of time, a sort of landlord. And, last of all he had to take a wife to look after his big household. One day, one of his friends, another monk, happened to visit him and was surprised to see his altered circumstances. When asked the reason, the holy man said, " It is all for the sake of a piece of loin-cloth ! "

pray ?' 'Oh, I am away from my beloved', was the answer. Both were in the same plight ; so they got along very well. (*All laugh.*)

"But one need not have any fear if one takes refuge in God. God protects His devotee."

HARI : "Well, why does it take many people such a long time to realize Him ?"

MASTER : "The truth is that a man doesn't feel restless for God unless he is finished with his enjoyments and duties. The physician says, referring to the patient : 'Let a few days pass first. Then a little medicine will do him good.'

"Narada said to Rama : 'Rama, you are passing Your time in Ayodhya. How will Ravana be killed ? You have taken this human body for that purpose alone.' Rama replied : 'Narada, let the right time come. Let Ravana's past actions begin to bear fruit. Then everything will be made ready for his death.'

HARI : "Why is there so much suffering in the world ?"

MASTER : "This world is the lila of God. It is like a game. In this game there are joy and sorrow, virtue and vice, knowledge and ignorance, good and evil. The game cannot continue if sin and suffering are altogether eliminated from the creation.

"In the game of hide-and-seek one must touch the 'granny' in order to be free. But the 'granny' is never pleased if she is touched at the very outset. It is God's wish that the play should continue for some time. Then—

Out of a hundred thousand kites, at best but one or two break free ;
And thou dost laugh and clap Thy hands, O Mother, watching
them !

In other words, after the practice of hard spiritual discipline, one or two have the vision of God, through His grace, and are liberated. Then the Divine Mother claps Her hands in joy and exclaims, 'Bravo ! There they go !'

HARI : "But this play of God is our death."

MASTER (*smiling*) : "Please tell me who *you* are. God alone has become all this—*maya*, the universe, living beings, and the twenty-four cosmic principles. 'As the snake I bite, and as the charmer I cure.' It is God Himself who has become both *vidya* and *avidya*. He remains deluded by the *maya* of *avidya*, ignorance. Again, with the help of the guru, He is cured by the *maya* of *vidya*, Knowledge.

"Ignorance, Knowledge, and Perfect Wisdom. The *jnani* sees that God alone exists and is the Doer, that He creates, preserves, and destroys. The *vijnani* sees that it is God who has become all this.

"After attaining *mahabhava* and *prema* one realizes that nothing exists but God. Bhakti pales before *bhava*. *Bhava* ripens into *mahabhava* and *prema*.

(To Bannerji) : "Do you still hear that gong-like sound at the time of meditation ?"

BANNERJI : "Yes, sir. Everyday. Besides, I have visions of God's form. Do such things stop after the mind has once experienced them ?"

PLACES OF THE MASTER'S SADHANA IN DAKSHINESWAR



The Panchavati



Bel Tree

MASTER : " True. Once the wood catches fire, it cannot be put out.
 (To the devotees) He knows many things about faith."

BANNERJI : " I have too much faith."

MASTER : " Bring the women of your family with those of Balaram's."

BANNERJI : " Who is Balaram ? "

MASTER : " Don't you know Balaram ? He lives at Bosepara."

Sri Ramakrishna loved guileless people. Narendra Bannerji was absolutely guileless. The Master loved Niranjan¹ because he, too, was without guile.

MASTER (to M.) : " Why do I ask you to see Niranjan ? It is to find out if he is truly guileless."

Sunday, May 25, 1884

Sri Ramakrishna was sitting on the cement platform that encircled the trunk of the old banyan-tree in the Panchavati. Vijay, Surendra, Bhavanath, Rakhal, and other devotees were present, a few of them sitting with the Master on the platform, the rest on the ground below. The devotees had thought of celebrating the Master's birthday, which had had to be put off because of his illness. Since Sri Ramakrishna now felt much better, the devotees wanted to have the celebration that day. A woman musician, a famous singer of kirtan, was going to entertain them with devotional songs.

It was one o'clock in the afternoon. M. had been looking for Sri Ramakrishna in the Master's room. When he did not find him there, he went to the Panchavati and eagerly asked the devotees, " Where is he ? " He was standing right in front of the Master but in his excitement did not notice him. The devotees laughed loudly. A moment later M. saw Sri Ramakrishna and felt very much embarrassed. He prostrated himself before the Master, who sat there facing the south and smiling happily. Kedar and Vijay were sitting at his left. These two devotees had had a misunderstanding recently when Kedar had cut off his connection with the Brahmo Samaj.

MASTER (to M., with a smile) : " You see how I have united them ? "

The Master had brought a madhavi creeper from Vrindavan in the year 1868 and had planted it in the Panchavati. The creeper had grown big and strong. Some children were jumping and swinging from it. The Master observed them and laughed. He said : " They are like young monkeys. They will not give up swinging even though they sometimes fall to the ground." Noticing that Surendra was standing before him, the Master said to him affectionately : " Come up and sit with us on the platform. Then you can dangle your feet comfortably." Surendra went up and took his seat. Bhavanath had his coat on. Surendra said to him, " Are you going to England ? "

MASTER (smiling) : " God is our England. Now and then I used to leave off my clothes and joyfully roam about naked. Once Sambhu said to me : ' It is very comfortable to walk about naked. That is why you do it. Once I did it myself.' "

¹ A young disciple of the Master, who later became a monk under the name of Swami Niranjanananda.

SURENDRA : "On returning from the office, as I put away my coat and trousers, I say to the Divine Mother, 'O Mother, how tightly You have bound me to the world !'"

MASTER : "There are eight fetters with which man is bound : shame, hatred, fear, pride of caste, hesitation, the desire to conceal, and so forth."

Sri Ramakrishna sang :

Mother, this is the grief that sorely grieves my heart,
That even with Thee for Mother, and though I am wide awake,
There should be robbery in my house. . . .

He continued :

In the world's busy market-place, O Syama, Thou art flying kites ;
High up they soar on the wind of hope, held fast by maya's string.
Their frames are human skeletons, their sails of the three gunas
made ;
But all their curious workmanship is merely for ornament.

Upon the kite-strings Thou hast rubbed the manja-paste of
worldliness,
So as to make each straining strand all the more sharp and strong.
Out of a hundred thousand kites, at best but one or two break free ;
And Thou dost laugh and clap Thy hands, O Mother, watching
them !

On favouring winds, says Ramprasad, the kites set loose will
speedily
Be borne away to the infinite, across the sea of the world.

MASTER : "'Maya's string' means wife and children.

Upon the kite-strings Thou hast rubbed the manja-paste of
worldliness.

'Worldliness' means 'woman and gold'.

"The three gunas—sattva, rajas, and tamas—have men under their control. They are like three brothers. As long as sattva exists, it calls on rajas for help ; and rajas can get help from tamas. The three gunas are so many robbers. Tamas kills and rajas binds. Sattva no doubt releases man from his bondage, but it cannot take him to God."

VIJAY (smiling) : "It is because sattva, too, is a robber."

MASTER (smiling) : "True. Sattva cannot take man to God, but it shows him the way."

BHAVANATH : "These are wonderful words indeed."

MASTER : "Yes, this is a lofty thought."

Listening to these words of the Master, the devotees felt very happy.

MASTER : "'Woman and gold' is the cause of bondage. 'Woman and gold' alone constitutes samsara, the world. It is 'woman and gold' that keeps one from seeing God. (*Holding the towel in front of his face*) Do you see my face any more ? Of course not. The towel hides it. No sooner is the covering

of 'woman and gold' removed than one attains Chidananda, Consciousness and Bliss.

"Let me tell you something. He who has renounced the pleasure of a wife has verily renounced the pleasure of the world. God is very near to such a person."

The devotees listened to these words in silence.

MASTER (*to Kedar, Vijay, and the other devotees*) : "He who has renounced the pleasure of a wife has verily renounced the pleasure of the world. It is 'woman and gold' that hides God. You people have such imposing moustaches, and yet you too are involved in 'woman and gold'. Tell me if it isn't true. Search your heart and answer me."

VIJAY : "Yes, it is true."

Kedar remained silent.

MASTER : "I see that all are under the control of woman. One day I went to Captain's house. From there I was to go to Ram's house. So I said to Captain, 'Please give me my carriage hire.' He asked his wife about it. She too held back and said : 'What's the matter? What's the matter?' At last Captain said, 'Ram will take care of it.' You see, the *Gita*, the *Bhagavata*, and the *Vedanta* all bow before a woman! (*All laugh.*)

"A man leaves his money, his property, and everything in the hands of his wife. But he says with affected simplicity, 'I have such a nature that I cannot keep even two rupees with me.'

"A man went to an office in search of a job. There were many vacancies, but the manager did not grant his request. A friend said to the applicant, 'Appeal to Golapi, and you will get the job.' Golapi was the manager's mistress.

"Men do not realize how far they are dragged down by women. Once I went to the Fort in a carriage, feeling all the while that I was going along a level road. At last I found that I had gone four storeys down. It was a sloping road.

"A man possessed by a ghost does not know he is under the ghost's control. He thinks he is quite normal."

VIJAY (*smiling*) : "But he can be cured by an exorcist if he finds one."

In answer to Vijay Sri Ramakrishna only said, "That depends on the will of God." Then he went on with his talk about women.

MASTER : "Everyone I talk to says, 'Yes, sir, my wife is good.' Nobody says that his wife is bad. (*All laugh.*) Those who constantly live with 'woman and gold' are so infatuated with it that they don't see things properly. Chess-players oftentimes cannot see the right move for their pieces on the board. But those who watch the game from a distance can understand the moves more accurately."

"Woman is the embodiment of maya. In the course of his hymn to Rama, Narada said : 'O Rama, all men are parts of Thee. All women are parts of Sita, the personification of Thy maya. Please deign to grant that I may have pure love for Thy Lotus Feet and that I may not be deluded by Thy world-bewitching maya. I do not want any other favour than that.'

Surendra's younger brother and his nephews were present. The brother worked in an office and one of the nephews was studying law.

MASTER (*to Surendra's relatives*) : " My advice to you is not to become attached to the world. You see, Rakhal now understands what is knowledge and what is ignorance. He can discriminate between the Real and the unreal. So I say to him : ' Go home. You may come here once in a while and spend a day or two with me. '

" Have a friendly relationship with one another. That will be for your good and make you all happy. In a theatre the performance goes well only if the musicians sing with one voice. And that also gladdens the hearts of the audience.

" Do your worldly duties with a part of your mind and direct most of it to God. A sadhu should think of God with three quarters of his mind and with one quarter should do his other duties. He should be very alert about spiritual things. The snake is very sensitive in its tail. Its whole body reacts when it is hurt there. Similarly, the whole life of a sadhu is affected when his spirituality is touched."

Sri Ramakrishna was going to the pine-grove and asked Gopal of Sinthi to take his umbrella to his room. Arrangements had been made in the Panchavati for the kirtan. When the Master had returned and taken his seat again among the devotees, the musician began her song. Suddenly there came a rain-storm. The Master went back to his room with the devotees, the musician accompanying them to continue her songs there.

MASTER (*to Gopal*) : " Have you brought the umbrella ? "

GOPAL : " No, sir. I forgot all about it while listening to the music."

The umbrella had been left in the Panchavati and Gopal hurried to fetch it.

MASTER : " I am generally careless, but not to that extent. Rakhal also is very careless. Referring to the date of an invitation, he says ' the eleventh ' instead of ' the thirteenth '. And Gopal—he belongs in a herd of cows ! "⁵

The musician sang a song about the monastic life of Chaitanya. Now and then she improvised lines : " He will not look upon a woman ; for that is against the sannyasi's duty." " Eager to take away men's sorrows, he will not look upon a woman." " For the Lord's birth as Sri Chaitanya otherwise would be in vain."

The Master stood up, as he heard about Chaitanya's renunciation, and went into samadhi. The devotees put garlands of flowers around his neck. Bhavanath and Rakhal supported his body lest he should fall on the ground. Vijay, Kedar, Ram, M., Latu, and the other devotees stood around him in a circle, recalling one of the scenes of Chaitanya's kirtan.

The Master gradually came down to the sense plane. He was talking to Krishna, now and then uttering the word " Krishna ". He could not say it very distinctly because of the intensity of his spiritual emotion. He said : " Krishna ! Krishna ! Krishna ! Krishna Satchidananda ! Nowadays I do not see Your form. Now I see You both inside me and outside. I see that it is

⁵ There is a pun on the word " Gopal ", which means also " herd of cows ".

You who have become the universe, all living beings, the twenty-four cosmic principles, and everything else. You alone have become mind, intelligence, everything. It is said in the 'Hymn of Salutation to the Guru': 'I bow down to the Guru by whose grace I have realized Him who pervades the indivisible universe of the animate and the inanimate.'

"You alone are the Indivisible. Again, it is You who pervade the universe of the animate and the inanimate. You are verily the manifold universe; again, You alone are its basis. O Krishna! You are my life. O Krishna! You are my mind. O Krishna! You are my intelligence. O Krishna! You are my soul. O Govinda! You are my life-breath. You are my life itself."

Vijay was also in an ecstatic mood. The Master asked him, "My dear sir, have you too become unconscious?" "No, sir", said Vijay humbly.

The music went on. The musician was singing about the blinding love of God. As she improvised the lines :

O Beloved of my soul ! Within the chamber of my heart
I would have kept You day and night !

the Master again went into samadhi. His injured arm rested on Bhavanath's shoulder.

Sri Ramakrishna partly regained outer consciousness. The musician improvised :

Why should one who, for Thy sake, has given up everything
Endure so much of suffering ?

The Master bowed to the musician and sat down to listen to the music. Now and then he became abstracted. When the musician stopped singing, Sri Ramakrishna began to talk to the devotees.

MASTER (*to Vijay and the others*) : "What is prema? He who feels it, this intense and ecstatic love of God, not only forgets the world but forgets even the body, which is so dear to all. Chaitanya experienced it."

The Master explained this to the devotees by singing a song describing the ecstatic state of prema :

Oh, when will dawn the blessed day
When tears of joy will flow from my eyes
As I repeat Lord Hari's name ? . . .

The Master began to dance, and the devotees joined him. He caught M. by the arm and dragged him into the circle. Thus dancing, Sri Ramakrishna again went into samadhi. Standing transfixed, he looked like a picture on canvas. Kedar repeated the following hymn to bring his mind down from the plane of samadhi :

We worship the Brahman-Consciousness in the Lotus of the Heart,
The Undifferentiated, who is adored by Hari, Hara, and Brahma ;
Who is attained by yogis in the depths of their meditation ;
The Scatterer of the fear of birth and death,
The Essence of Knowledge and Truth, the Primal Seed of
the world.